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Memorialization and the Limits of Reconciliation: Transnational Memory Circuits of  
the Korean War

By

Kristen Frances Sun

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Ethnic Studies

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

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Professor Jinsoo An

Professor Shari Huhndorf

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## Abstract

## Memorialization and the Limits of Reconciliation: Transnational Memory Circuits of the Korean War

by

Kristen Frances Sun

Doctor of Philosophy in Ethnic Studies

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Elaine H. Kim, Chair

The Korean War, as a “hot war” within the Cold War period with participation by 21 member nations of the UN and the People’s Republic of China, and also an unresolved civil war between South Korea and North Korea, is characterized by still-present animosities, which play out in contemporary politics in the Asia-Pacific region, as well as for the U.S. Furthermore, memoryscapes of the Korean War continue to be shaped and reshaped in the present. My dissertation examines built spaces and cultural texts of Korean War memorialization, focusing specifically on films, museums, and memorials in South Korea and the U.S. in the “post-Cold War” conjuncture. It focuses specifically on the theme of reconciliation to ask, how do Korean War memorial texts and spaces attempt to reconcile an unfinished Cold War conflict in a post-Cold War world?

I trace the theme of reconciliation in multiple ways – first, I utilize the common definition of reconciliation as an act of bringing issues to an agreement. For example, how do memorial texts and built spaces suture histories and memories into coherent or cohering narratives? Furthermore, I examine reconciliation as a specific affective theme in South Korean popular and national cultures, particularly through the imagined reunification between South Korea and North Korea, and/or separated family members stuck on opposite sides of the DMZ border as well as divided ideologically. Lastly, I examine reconciliation as a conceptual theme underlying memorialization of the Korean War in relation to Cold War memory and history – what is the relationship between memorialization and history, particularly as memorial and national texts attempt to make sense of Korean War history (as a technically unfinished war) with Cold War history (as a “finished” event)?

Memorials and national/popular memory of the Korean War are thus necessarily changing or constantly being amended in flux with changing presidential administrations as well as in response to veterans or civic groups in both the U.S. and South Korea. In studying the memory of war, it is impossible to ignore the ways in which memory and memorial discourses travel across geographic space in reference to each other, whether intentional or not. Drawing from the rich genealogy of Asian American cultural critique, this dissertation argues that critical Asian American memorial studies as methodology to study memorialization can bring out transnational narratives and allows for the multiple subjectivities of

museum/memorial visitors and film viewers to enable readings beyond existing Cold War frameworks and narratives in both South Korea and the U.S. Through conducting a transnational study of Korean War memory, this dissertation rethinks the Korean War as “forgotten war” or as the benchmark for showcasing South Korean developmentalism (“forgotten victory” discourse), but rather the nuances in differential layers of forgettings and rememberings that constitute Korean War memoryscapes in the “post-Cold War” period.

## Dedication

For Mom (媽媽) and Baba (爸爸)

Thank you for everything

## Table of Contents

Dedication	i
Acknowledgements	iii
Introduction	vii
Chapter One	1
“Freedom is not free”: Tracing Transnational Korean War Discourses in the Post-Cold War Conjuncture	
Chapter Two	22
Korean War Memorialization and Temporality in “Post”-Cold War South Korean Blockbuster Cinema	
Chapter Three	40
Post-2010s Korean War Cinema: Responsibility, Misrepresentation, and Archival Memory	
Chapter Four	60
Broadening the Temporal and Spatial Scope of the Korean War: Performing Art and Trauma at the Civilian Control Line (CCL) and Gwangju, South Korea	
Chapter Five/Conclusion	74
Memorializing the Future: Rethinking Temporality of the Korean War through Reunification Memorials in South Korea	
Works Cited	86

## Acknowledgements

In thinking through theoretical issues of gift, debt, and freedom within the dissertation, I am always reminded of an epigraph that I encountered while reading erin Khuê Ninh's text *Ingratitude: The Debt-Bound Daughter in Asian American Literature*, which has oftentimes stayed within my head as perhaps its own form of haunting:

Even  
After  
All this time  
The sun never says to the earth,  
"You owe  
Me."  
Look  
What Happens  
With a love like that,  
It lights the  
Whole  
Sky.  
Hafez, "Sun Never Says"<sup>1</sup>

I first encountered this text in a seminar that I took with Professor Elaine Kim on Asian American Cultural Studies, and I often refer back to this passage, but it feels particularly meaningful now. Throughout the writing process of my dissertation, I have struggled but also have been uplifted by the generosity, kindness, collegiality, compassion, care, and love of too many people to name here. I would not have been able to complete this dissertation without you all. Thank you for everything throughout the years.

Without a doubt, my dissertation committee – Professor Elaine H. Kim, Professor Jinsoo An, and Professor Shari Huhndorf – has been essential in helping me not only with the dissertation writing process, but also throughout my graduate school career. I entered graduate school specifically wanting to work with Elaine, and I am so grateful that she continued to stay on as my dissertation chair after retirement. I could not have asked for a more generous mentor. At her retirement party and celebration in 2015, a speaker mentioned an "Elaine diaspora" due to the many people she has impacted, mentored, and served as a role model to; I count myself so extremely fortunate to be part of this "diaspora" as well. When I first moved to California from the east coast of the U.S. in 2011 to enter graduate school, I did not know anyone and had few connections in the Bay Area. Elaine invited me to join the organization AWU (Asian Women United) and through this group, I was able to find friendship and community amidst the initial loneliness of moving to a new location. This is just one of many actions that I am grateful to Elaine for. Elaine has not only supported me academically, but also personally, and it is thanks to her that I can look back on my graduate studies and say that I have no regrets. Thank you for pushing me to become a better scholar and person, Elaine.

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<sup>1</sup> erin Khuê Ninh, *Ingratitude: The Debt-Bond Daughter in Asian American Literature* (New York: New York University Press, 2011): 159.



Professor Jinsoo An has modeled for me what great mentorship looks like, and I feel so fortunate that he joined UC Berkeley shortly after I entered as well. Jinsoo's breadth and depth of knowledge in Korean cinema and Korean Studies has been instrumental to my dissertation writing process, and his deep archive of Korean films ensured that I was never at a loss for resources. Jinsoo is also deeply caring and never fails to check in personally during our meetings as well – I could not have asked for a better mentor. I am grateful for Jinsoo's careful readings that pushed me to refine and develop my arguments theoretically and rhetorically. Thank you for giving me the courage to continue writing, Jinsoo.

Professor Shari Huhndorf has been incredibly supportive throughout my graduate school career, and was instrumental in leading me to study museums and helping me in crafting my qualifying exam field on Museum Studies and Race. Her graduate seminar on Visuality and Race really helped clarify and cement central themes that I was interested in within my own research, but did not quite know how to articulate. Additionally, when I was feeling discouraged from repeated fellowship rejections, Shari awarded me the Dean's Summer Research Grant, which helped me to visit South Korea for the first time and begin preliminary fieldwork. Shari has always responded promptly to any queries or issues, and has always been extremely supportive and helpful, and a model for service, scholarship, and mentorship to me. I could not have asked for a better dissertation committee.

I am grateful for the funding that I received throughout the years, which made it possible for me to conduct fieldwork, to do research, and to write. At UC Berkeley, thank you to the Department of Ethnic Studies, Graduate Division, Center for Race and Gender, Center for Korean Studies, Global Urban Humanities Initiative, the SSRC (specifically the Mellon Mays Travel and Research Grant), the Hass Junior Scholars Fellowship, and the Dissertation Completion Fellowship for funding throughout the academic year and summers. Additionally, the FLAS Academic Year Fellowship (2013-2014) funded my Korean language studies, and the Fulbright Fellowship (2014-2015) funded my year of fieldwork in South Korea. I would not have even thought to enter graduate school, let alone pursue a PhD, without the first research support that I received from the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship program at Northwestern University.

I owe many other scholars my gratitude for pushing me to think more critically, to write more effectively, and that have provided overall academic and other support throughout my graduate school years. Professor Keith Feldman, chair of my qualifying exam committee, has been a consistent source of mentorship during my coursework years. In the last few years of my program, I have had the amazing privilege to work with Professor Harvey Dong – for me, he is a true model of what engaged scholarship looks like as well as scholar-activism. I have learned so much from serving as his Graduate Student Instructor and Reader in the last few years. Thank you Harvey for reminding me of the importance of Asian American Studies historically and for new generations – my time at UC Berkeley has truly been enriched and made all the better from working together. I took a particularly memorable course with Professor Andy Shanken and Professor Lauren Kroiz on "City of Memory" that not only introduced me to important theoretical texts in architecture and memory, but also that paved the way for presentation and research funding that were essential for writing chapters of my dissertation. Professor John Lie and Laura Nelson's seminars in the Center for Korean Studies were instrumental in introducing me to the field of Korean Studies and helped me to gain confidence in presenting my

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Thank you to everyone throughout my journey for showing me love that lights up the whole sky.

## Introduction

### Memorialization and the Limits of Reconciliation: Transnational Memory Circuits of the Korean War

The Korean War,<sup>2</sup> as a “hot war” within the Cold War period with participation by 21 member nations of the UN and the People’s Republic of China, and also as an unresolved civil war between South Korea and North Korea,<sup>3</sup> is characterized by still-present animosities, which play out in contemporary politics in the Asia-Pacific region and for the U.S.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, memoryscapes of the Korean

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<sup>2</sup> Histories of the Korean War in both South Korea and the U.S. (including at national memorial sites in both countries) point to the temporal bracketing of the Korean War as falling between the dates of June 25<sup>th</sup>, 1950 – July 27<sup>th</sup>, 1953, beginning from North Korean crossing of the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel and ending with the signing of an Armistice Agreement calling for truth and ceasefire, and not an official peace treaty. The text of the Armistice Agreement can be found here:

<https://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=false&doc=85>. I intentionally do not provide dates for the Korean War in this opening because I want to call into question the officially accepted temporal boundaries of the war.

<sup>3</sup> Scholars, most notably Bruce Cumings, have complicated the June 25<sup>th</sup>, 1950 (6.25/*yugio*) beginning point of the Korean War by pointing to multiple other flashpoints and battles since the end of WWII and the struggle for legitimacy that characterizes the Korean War as both cold war conflict and civil war conflict. See especially Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War, Volume 1: Liberation and the Emergence of Separate Regimes, 1945-1947* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981) and Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War, Volume II: The Roaring of the Cataract, 1947-1950* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992). Other scholarship has also pointed out that the end of the Cold War has never truly come to the Korean peninsula, and to the importance of social history in telling the story of Cold War beyond the lens of ideological confrontations between superpower nations, which effaces the roles of ordinary people. See especially Heonik Kwon, *The Other Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010) and Masuda Hajimu, *Cold War Crucible: The Korean Conflict and the Postwar World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015).

<sup>4</sup> Korean American scholarship on the Korean War within Asian American studies has also contributed to understandings of how the Korean War has led to enduring institutions, memories, and legacies of U.S. militarism beyond external historical, temporal, and geographic markers. See Grace M. Cho, *Haunting the Korean Diaspora: Shame, Secrecy, and the Forgotten War* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008); Christine Hong, “The Unending Korean War,” *positions: east asia cultures critique* 23.4 (Fall 2015): 597-617; Jodi Kim, *Ends of Empire: Asian American Critique and the Cold War* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010); Ji-Yeon Yuh, “Moved by War: Migration, Diaspora, and the Korean War,” *Journal of Asian American Studies* 8.3 (October 2005): 277-292. Scholarship in South Korea has also pointed to the ways in which U.S. militarism and South Korean politics, particularly in regards to civilian massacres, have worked in concert with one another, having effects on not only the memory but also the historiography of the Korean War. See especially the work of Kim Dong-Choon: “Beneath the Tip of the Iceberg: Problems in Historical Clarification of the Korean War,” *Korea Journal* 42.3 (September 2002): 60-86; *The Unending Korean War: A Social History*, translated by Sung-ok Kim (Honolulu: Tamal Vista Publications, 2009); “The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Korea: Uncovering the Hidden Korean War,” *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* 8, issue 9, no. 5 (March 2010): 1-15; “The

War continue to be shaped and reshaped in the present. This dissertation examines built spaces and cultural texts of Korean War memorialization, focusing specifically on films, museums, and memorials in South Korea and the U.S. in the “post-Cold War.” It highlights the theme of reconciliation to explore how Korean War memorial texts and spaces attempt to reconcile an unfinished Cold War conflict in a post-Cold War world.

I trace the theme of reconciliation in multiple ways – first, I utilize the common definition of reconciliation as an act of bringing issues to an agreement. For example, how do memorial texts and built spaces suture histories and memories into coherent narratives? Then I examine reconciliation as a specific affective theme in South Korean popular and national cultures, particularly through the imagined reunification between South Korea and North Korea, and/or family members on opposite sides of the DMZ border who are physically and ideologically separated. Lastly, I examine reconciliation as a conceptual theme underlying South Korean and U.S. memorialization of the Korean War in relation to Cold War memory and history. What is the relationship between memorialization and history, particularly as memorial and national texts attempt to make sense of Korean War history (as a technically unfinished war) in the context of Cold War history (as a “finished” event)?

National and popular memory of the Korean War are constantly being amended, with changing U.S. and South Korean presidential administrations, as well as in response to veterans or civic groups in both nations. Building on anthropologist Christina Schwenkel’s theory of “recombinant history,” I also trace how “memory is shown to be an active, constitutive force.”<sup>5</sup> In studying the memory of war, it is impossible to ignore the ways in which memory and memorial discourses travel across geographic space in reference to each other, whether intentionally or not.

This dissertation examines how various modes of reconciliation within Korean War memoryscapes become entangled with one another, pointing to spaces of rupture and alternative critical readings of Korean War memorialization beyond dichotomies of remembering and forgetting. Drawing from the rich genealogy of Asian American cultural critique, this dissertation argues that critical Asian American memorial studies can be used as methodology to study memorialization in a way that can bring out transnational narratives and allow for the multiple subjectivities of museum/memorial visitors and film viewers to disrupt and enable readings beyond existing Cold War frameworks and narratives in both South Korea and the U.S. Through conducting a transnational study of Korean War memory, this dissertation rethinks the Korean War as “forgotten war” in U.S. contexts, or as the benchmark for showcasing how far South Korean developmentalism has come in the South Korean context (“forgotten victory”), but rather the nuances of differential layers of forgettings and rememberings that constitute Korean War memoryscapes in the “post-Cold War” period.

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social grounds of anticommunism in South Korea – crisis of the ruling class and anticommunist reaction,” *Asian Journal of German and European Studies* 2.7 (2017): 1-25.

<sup>5</sup> Christina Schwenkel, *The American War in Contemporary Vietnam: Transnational Remembrance and Representation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009): 10.

## Critical Asian American Memorial Studies

In my approach to Korean War memorialization, I point to the importance of Asian American subjectivity and subject formations, which open up possibilities for alternative readings and imagining of U.S. empire and cold war knowledge formations, particularly through cultural critique and cultural productions.<sup>6</sup> Asian American cultural critique, rather than solely enacting arguments about U.S. militarism and imperialism based on foreclosure, illuminates how the new subject formations that emerge from this critique can have life of their own as well.<sup>7</sup>

For example, Jodi Kim labels Asian American cultural texts as enacting a “politics of refusal,” a concept that she borrows from Native American studies scholar Audra Simpson.<sup>8</sup> The “politics of refusal” not only is a refusal of traditional knowledge production in which knowledge about specific populations are made legible for others, but also a refusal of Cold War Manichean boundaries:

Rather than claiming that Asian American cultural texts express a positivistic will to knowledge and countermemory, a wholesale rendering visible of that which official nationalist culture and history render invisible, I want to suggest that it complexly grapples with an impossibility and at times a certain refusal....Yet this politics of refusal is not the space of complete silence, meaninglessness, or illegibility....Asian American critique as an *unsettling hermeneutic* or analytic for interpreting Asian American cultural forms and the Cold War as a multivalenced object of analysis reads such refusals as generative moments.<sup>9</sup>

I extend Asian American cultural critique and readings of the subject formations of U.S. empire as a potential method for “de-imperializing.”<sup>10</sup> I approach Asian American cultural studies as not only a body of work,<sup>11</sup> but also as methodology.

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<sup>6</sup> See especially Kuan-Hsing Chen, *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); Jodi Kim, *Ends of Empire: Asian American Critique and the Cold War* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010); Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

<sup>7</sup> Victor Bascara, *Model-Minority Imperialism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006); Vernadette Vicuña Gonzalez, *Securing Paradise: Tourism and Militarism in Hawai'i and the Philippines* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013); Jodi Kim, “Settler Modernity, Debt Imperialism, and the Necropolitics of the Promise,” *Social Text* 36.2 (2018): 41-61; Mimi Thi Nguyen, *The Gift of Freedom: War, Debt, and Other Refugee Passages* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012).

<sup>8</sup> For more on the “politics of refusal,” particularly in the context of ethnography and Native Studies, see Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).

<sup>9</sup> Jodi Kim, *Ends of Empire: Asian American Critique and the Cold War* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010): 6-7.

<sup>10</sup> Kuan-Hsing Chen, *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

<sup>11</sup> Victor Bascara, *Model-Minority Imperialism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006); Mark Chiang, *The Cultural Capital of Asian American Studies: Autonomy and Representation in the University* (New York: New York University Press, 2009); Kandice Chuh, *Imagine Otherwise: On Asian Americanist Critique* (Durham: Duke University Press,

While the texts that I study – films, museums, and memorials – can be read as reified sites for nationalism, conservatism, and universalism, analyzing these texts from the vantage point of Asian American cultural critique can call into question memorial form and memorialization techniques in the post-Cold War period, particularly in addressing how memorial texts reconcile an unfinished war in a so-called “post”-Cold War period.

Critical Asian American memorial studies can also be put into conversation with texts on the enduring legacies of the Cold War. Chen Kuan-Hsing’s book is particularly useful for giving space to subjectivity as a starting point, a methodological approach, and an intervention in thinking about “inter-referencing” conditions in Cold War/“post”-Cold War (East) Asian contexts. Chen writes:

The effects of the cold war have become embedded in local history, and simply pronouncing the war to be over will not cause them to dissolve. The complex effects of the war, mediated through our bodies, have been inscribed into our national, family, and personal histories. In short, the cold war is still alive within us.<sup>12</sup>

Chen’s assertion of the cold war subjectivities that is material in form, as well as affective, can also be read alongside Heonik Kwon’s assertion that geographical spaces of local specificity reflect the different “decomposing” temporalities of the Cold War. Furthermore, this assertion of the materiality of the Cold War that lives on in the body and that is “still alive within us” connects to Jodi Kim’s discussion of the “double injunction” for Korean Americans in regards to memory of the Korean War, which is “to forget (as assimilated Americans) and to remember (as gendered racial Korean immigrants and postimperial ‘exiles.’”<sup>13</sup> The dialectics of remembering (as “immigrants”) and forgetting (as “Americans”) constitutes a central problematic for American cultural productions and politics more broadly in the “post”-Cold War period.

As Elaine H. Kim writes,

What most Americans know about Korea has been told from the point of view of a U.S. military member or a missionary, about prostitutes, beggars, and orphans, many of them mixed race children, never speaking but always spoken for and about, souls being saved by the civilizing missions of neocolonialism and evangelism. No doubt they would have found it difficult to imagine that one

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2003); Allan Punzalan Isaac, *American Tropics: Articulating Filipino America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006); Laura Kang, *Compositional Subjects: Enfiguring Asian/American Women* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002); Elaine H. Kim, *Asian American Literature: An Introduction to the Writings and their Social Context* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982); Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Ji-Yeon Yuh, “Moved by War: Migration, Diaspora, and the Korean War,” *Journal of Asian American Studies* 8.3 (October 2005): 277-292.

<sup>12</sup> Kuan-Hsing Chen, *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010): 118.

<sup>13</sup> Jodi Kim, *Ends of Empire: Asian American Critique and the Cold War* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010): 146. This is also an argument made by Lisa Lowe in *Immigrant Acts*, of the vexed position of Asian Americans in the U.S.

day the voice of the native, having returned to the imperial center, might speak back – in English – from its very different positionality.<sup>14</sup>

This text is an example of how Asian American studies and Asian American cultural productions can rethink Cold War binaries and non/alignments. Korean Americans, and by extension Asian Americans who have also been affected by cold war/hot war migrations, exile, forced displacement or adoption, and refugeehood (what Ji-Yeon Yuh refers to as “refuge migrations”<sup>15</sup>), are not just objects for study, as is often the case for fields that emerge from Cold War national security concerns such as area studies, but also have subjectivities and positionalities that can “speak back” (or even speak for empire, as Mimi Thi Nguyen writes about the “refugee patriot”<sup>16</sup>). Thus, critical Asian American memorial studies is the foundation, methodology, and groundwork for analyzing the transnational memory texts examined in this project.

### Global/Transnational War Memory Studies

While engaging with the field of memory studies, and specifically transnational war memory studies, I understand that memory is not a static force, and even though memory is often associated with particular and fixed spaces and places, the formations, experiences, and consumption of war memory are necessarily transnational. As Christina Schwenkel writes, “Memory is shown to be an active constitutive force; it moves, mobilizes, produces, and transforms, rather than simply dwell and exist.”<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, while I engage with several key concepts and terms in memory studies, I also want to emphasize some of my departures from these key theories. Particularly, I focus on three concepts: history and memory, collective memory, and cosmopolitan memory/cosmopolitan commemoration.

Memory studies scholars, drawing from Pierre Nora’s influential work “Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*,”<sup>18</sup> point to the oppositional characteristics between memory and history. History is portrayed as being “truth” or “official,” whereas memories – deemed less trustworthy – are more fluid and give shape to human experience in a way that archives and histories cannot necessarily do. However, I have found that in my own research on the Korean War, there does not seem to be an agreed-upon history. For example, the causes of the Korean War have been continuously debated by historians – was the official starting point of the Korean War a surprise attack by North Koreans? Archival documents indicate that this was the case; however, scholars like Bruce Cumings have questioned the temporality of

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<sup>14</sup> Elaine H. Kim, “Myth, Memory, and Desire: Homeland and History in Contemporary Korean American Writing and Visual Art,” in *Holding Their Own: Perspectives on the Multi-Ethnic Literatures of the United States*, eds., Dorothea Fischer-Hornung and Heike Raphael-Hernandez (Tubingen, Germany: Stauffenberg-Verlag, 2000).

<sup>15</sup> Ji-Yeon Yuh, “Moved by War: Migration, Diaspora, and the Korean War,” *Journal of Asian American Studies* 8.3 (October 2005): 277-292.

<sup>16</sup> Mimi Thi Nguyen, *The Gift of Freedom: War, Debt, and Other Refugee Passages* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), especially Chapter 3 “Race Wars, Patriot Acts.”

<sup>17</sup> Christina Schwenkel, *The American War in Contemporary Vietnam: Transnational Remembrance and Representation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009): 10.

<sup>18</sup> Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*,” *Representations* No. 26, Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory (Spring 1989): 7-24.



the Korean War by analyzing flashpoints before June 25<sup>th</sup>, 1950.<sup>19</sup> Additionally, events like the Jeju Massacre or Uprising, which took place in 1948, could be seen as part of the Korean War conflict. Furthermore, there are few existing documents relating to civilian massacres during the war, whether perpetrated by North Koreans, South Koreans, or the U.S. and UN militaries. Basic historical information, such as timelines or death tolls, varies widely depending on the sources.<sup>20</sup>

In the case of civilian massacres, while evidence exists of U.S. massacres of Korean civilians, the U.S. has never admitted that specific massacres took place. As Seunghei Clara Hong observes, “By affirming participation but gainsaying direct involvement, the investigated turned the massacre at Nogunri into an incredible, ghostly event in which ‘people died, but no one [was] killed.’”<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, the ongoing “history wars” relating to WWII<sup>22</sup> and the Asia-Pacific Wars,<sup>23</sup> which continue to cause disputes among China, South Korea, Japan, etc. demonstrates that history itself is contested just as fiercely as memory in Cold War and post-Cold War periods. Likewise, my experience of research in South Korea, especially in museums and memorials that do not champion or match the central narratives of Korean War discourse such as the Nogunri Peace Park and the Jeju 4.3 Peace Park, has shown that Korean War history and memory have been hotly debated as well. While the history and memory debates within the field are productive, most of them are Eurocentric and do not necessarily take into account contexts elsewhere in the world in which so-called “official” histories can be denied or contested just as fiercely as survivors’ memories, particularly in the context of enduring legacies of colonialism, continuing affects of militarism, and ongoing Cold War politics of legitimacy. Therefore, while acknowledging history/memory debates for memory studies as a field, I am attentive to the ways in which the slippages between history and memory are often greater than their boundaries.

“Collective memory” is perhaps one of the most important keywords in memory studies,<sup>24</sup> but I avoid using the term and instead use “national memory” and “popular cultural memory” to indicate that I am writing about national memorials, museums, and films. While I think that “collective memory” does exist in some form, it seems as if it is often interchangeably used with national memory without

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<sup>19</sup> Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War, Volume I: Liberation and the Emergence of Separate Regimes, 1945-1947* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981) and *The Origins of the Korean War, Volume II: The Roaring of the Cataract, 1947-1950* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

<sup>20</sup> This can also be reflected in the naming of the Korean War as well – the Korean War (*han’gukchŏnjaeng*) in the U.S. and South Korea, *yukio* or 6.25 for the day the war began in South Korea, Fatherland Liberation War (*choguk’aebangjŏnjaeng*) in North Korea, and the War to Resist America and Aid Korea in China.

<sup>21</sup> Seunghei Clara Hong, “Silenced in Memoriam: Consuming Memory at the Nogunri Peace Park,” *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review* 4.1 (May 2015): 136.

<sup>22</sup> See Sheila Miyoshi Jager and Rana Mitter, eds., *Ruptured Histories: War, Memory, and the Post-Cold War in Asia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007) and Michael Lewis, ed., *‘History Wars’ and Reconciliation in Japan and Korea: The Role of Historians, Artists and Activists* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

<sup>23</sup> T. Fujitani, Geoffrey M. White, and Lisa Yoneyama, eds., *Perilous Memories: The Asia-Pacific War(s)* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).

<sup>24</sup> Jeffrey K. Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Daniel Levy, eds., *The Collective Memory Reader* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

problematizing nationalism or taking into account transnational and transpacific memory connections.<sup>25</sup> The problem with using “collective memory” is that it assumes a homogenous group of people with similar or cohering memories. As Asian Americanists Lisa Lowe and Jodi Kim contend, Asian American memory is unique from, and even counter to U.S. dominant national memories or narratives. Even within Asian American communities, memory differs and the collectivity of that memory is influenced by Cold War politics. The “collective” of “collective memory” must be problematized to be useful, although it helps in understanding nationalism in relation to memorials and museums.

Lastly, cosmopolitan memories or cosmopolitan commemoration flattens “locally specific” experiences. In the case of the Korean War memorials and museums, tropes such as gratitude (and its implied debt) for the “gift of freedom” emerge. Nationalist spaces such as the War Memorial of Korea and what started as more local but became national spaces such as the Nogunri Peace Park reflect a “conservative” ethos: one upholds Korean ethnonationalism and one universalizes a human rights discourse that obscures why the Korean War or the Nogunri Massacre happened in the first place. Jinsoo An also points out how South Korean films about the Korean War, whether anti-communist or anti-war, also reflect a conservative perspective through “highlighting humanistic values” and the same “framework of liberal humanism that anticommunist war films have developed as an ideological foil to the ostensible depravity and monstrosity of North Korea.”<sup>26</sup> This dissertation problematizes memorialization of the Korean War beyond the nationalist and universalist claims that are made in museums, memorials, and films.

Furthermore, the shift in memory studies discourse from collective memory to cosmopolitan memory can be seen in Holocaust studies scholarship,<sup>27</sup> as well as writings on the commemoration of Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombing victims. Like An’s critique of Korean War films that are both nationalist and anti-war, Hiro Saito articulates a critique of Holocaust commemoration and memory as cosmopolitan:

Paradoxically, then, the cosmopolitan commemoration of the Holocaust reproduces the “either/or logic” of nationalism because it dehumanizes foreign perpetrators as enemies, even though they, too, are humans who may very well be victimized by those who claim to be absolute liberators coming to the rescue of absolute victims.<sup>28</sup>

The problem that arises from these critiques, however, is that it becomes quite difficult to envision alternate imaginings of commemoration. While the concept of

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<sup>25</sup> Paul Connerton, *How Modernity Forgets* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Jeffrey K. Olick, “Introduction: Memory and the Nation: Continuities, Conflicts, and Transformations,” *Social Science History* 22.4, Special Issue: Memory and the Nation (Winter 1998): 377-387.

<sup>26</sup> Jinsoo An, “War as Business in South Korea’s Manchurian Action Films,” *positions* 23.4 (2015): 792.

<sup>27</sup> Daniel Levy and Nathan Sznaider, “Memory Unbound: The Holocaust and the Formation of Cosmopolitan Memory,” *European Journal of Social Theory* 5.1 (2002): 87-106.

<sup>28</sup> Hiro Saito, “‘The A-bomb victims’ pleas for cosmopolitan commemoration: Toward reconciliation and world peace,” *Thesis Eleven* 129.1 (2015): 75.

“absolute liberators” or “absolute victims” should be critiqued, the issue of “absolute perpetrator” should not be left out of the equation as well.<sup>29</sup> In the case of the Korean War, for example, to recognize the U.S. as perpetrator (in contradistinction to the U.S. as “absolute savior”) is crucially important in challenging the dominant narratives of the Korean War. If neither nationalist narratives nor universal/cosmopolitan narratives are ideal, then how to proceed with theorizing memorialization? Moreover, to think through reconciliation, at what point does reconciliation become synonymous with forgetting as in “to forgive and forget”? And how to think of “cosmopolitan commemoration” and reconciliation alongside issues of power?

### **Rethinking Korean War Memorialization through Cinematic and Memorial Converges**

The chapters that follow address reconciliation specifically in relation to the Korean War as one of the problematics in memorializations of the war, which has been referred to as the “Forgotten War” in U.S. contexts. Much new scholarship about the Korean War attempts to prove why it is not forgotten.<sup>30</sup> Yet, while the Korean War in the South Korean context is not a forgotten war, it is still written into U.S. and ROK narratives of progress and developmentalism (the Korean War for example as the rock bottom or starting point that made the “Miracle on the Han River” so much more impressive), especially in museum contexts. One of the biggest problems with thinking about reconciliation and memorialization is that there is a slight slippage: the Korean War is an unfinished war within a “post”-Cold War world that makes its contemporary memorialization more unique. In particular, convergences between memorials and films point to new readings for memorialization in the contemporary period. I utilize the example of 2004 South Korean blockbuster film *Taegukgi: The Brotherhood of War* and the War Memorial of Korea to demonstrate how politics of memorialization are intricately tied together in the mediums of films, memorials, and museums, a thread that runs throughout the dissertation.

A commander in the South Korean film *Taegukgi: The Brotherhood of War* (Kang Je-gyu, 2004), one of the most popular Korean War blockbusters for South Korean and international audiences, states to the main protagonist, Lee Jin-t’ae (played by Jang Dong-gun) that “you have to give to your country before asking for something.” Throughout the film, Jin-t’ae tries to find ways to protect his sickly younger brother, Lee Jin-sŏk, from participating in the horrors of war. With the “advice” of the commander, he attempts to earn a medal of honor in exchange for his brother’s military service, to the point where he increasingly takes part in more and more suicidal missions.

On a similar vein, the introductory plaque at the War Memorial of Korea in Yongsan, Seoul, states in English the phrase “Freedom is not free,” and in Korean

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<sup>29</sup> For critique along these lines in the context of WWII and the Cold War see Lisa Yoneyama, *Cold War Ruins: Transpacific Critique of American Justice and Japanese War Crimes* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

<sup>30</sup> For some examples see Suhi Choi, *Embattled Memories: Contested Meanings in Korean War Memorials* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2014) and Levi Fox, *Not Forgotten: The Korean War in American Public Memory, 1950-2017* (PhD diss.: Temple University, 2018).

“freedom is not given freely,”<sup>31</sup> which will be discussed in greater detail in the first chapter. The appearance of an unfree freedom, or freedom with strings attached, in both the contexts of the War Memorial of Korea and *Taegukgi: The Brotherhood of War* shows the similarities in how the Korean War is memorialized in both texts. Specifically, an analysis of *Taegukgi* illustrates the interconnections between physical memorial spaces and film texts as memorials.

*Taegukgi: The Brotherhood of War* begins in the present-day with the Korean War Excavation Task Unit carefully excavating bodies from a battlefield. The film literally begins from the perspective of the dead – the first shot of the film is that of darkness and the darkness/dirt is brushed away by members of the excavation task unit. The next shot then reveals them uncovering bodies, objects, and weapons. For the first few seconds of the film, the viewers take the place of the dead and as they are unveiled, the viewers are also entering into the story of the film and thus, undergo a re-discovery/recovery/re-memory of the Korean War.

After beginning from the first-person perspective of the skeletons, the scene then moves to the excavation task unit as they carefully brush the dirt off the bones and place the bones and objects (guns, canteens, helmets, etc.) into different cases based on the category of item. The remains are then placed into caskets draped with the t'aegukki – the South Korean national flag – and the excavation task units salute the caskets under a banner labeled “Memorial Site for souls of the Korean War.” Setting itself apart from other earlier popular South Korean films about the Korean War, *Taegukgi* presents the Korean War as flashback, as the film opens with the present day and specifically, with a commemoration ceremony.

The beginning of *Taegukgi* parallels the introductory video that introduces the first Korean War room at the War Memorial of Korea. This opening film, a common introductory exhibit in museums to establish historical context and overarching narratives, introduces an overview of the Korean War and ends with a 3D rendering of the UN Memorial Cemetery in Busan and 3D rain that splashes over the graves. This scene then cuts to archival footage of Korean War Excavation Task Units, recovering bodies and objects, similar to the opening of *Taegukgi*. The archival footage, including images of forests, bones, and excavators digging, is then overlaid with varying t'aegukki patterns. These patterns then reveal the t'aegukki-draped boxes containing the remains carried by excavators and saluted by fellow soldiers. The screen fades and the phrase “Freedom is not free” and its Korean translation appear on the screen.<sup>32</sup> After the video is over, the flooring lights up, revealing an open-view floor that is a replica of the excavation site, replete with bones and miscellaneous materials.

This floor is not just any random excavation site, but rather a specific site on Baekseok Mountain. The title of this exhibition is “Reunion of the Fallen Brothers after 60 Years.” The following description reads:

In late October 2010, the Remains Recovery Team of the ROK MND excavated the remains and identification tag of a dead soldier on Baekseok Mountain. According to a DNA test, the remains turned out to be those of Sergeant First Class Lee, Cheon Woo of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Btn., 3<sup>rd</sup> Regt. of the ROK 7<sup>th</sup> Div.

<sup>31</sup> “Chayunŭn köjō chuōjinŭn köshi anida.”

<sup>32</sup> “Chayunŭn köjō chuōjiji annŭnda.”

Sergeant Lee volunteered to join the Army in Sept 1950, following his older brother who joined the army one month earlier. Sergeant Lee participated in the Seoul Recovery Operation and the northward advancement and was killed on the battlefield on 25 Sept. 1951 at the age of 20.

His older brother, Staff Sergeant Lee, Man Woo who had been killed at the Bongilcheon battle in May 1951 and buried at Seoul National Cemetery. The remains of Sergeant Lee, Cheon Woo were buried next to his brother's in June 2011. The two brothers were reunited after 60 years.

The video introducing the Korean War to museum visitors ends both with the recovery of soldiers' remains and a replica of a specific site in which the remains of a soldier were found. Additionally, the motif of brothers reunited in death echoes *Taegukgi*, although there the younger brother ultimately outlives his older brother and is reunited only with bones and material remains at the end.

In *Taegukgi*, the older brother defects to the North Korean side as he believes his brother has already perished in a deadly fire. Furthermore, his fiancé is executed by South Korean soldiers in an anti-communist roundup, a scene that sheds some complexity and moral ambiguity to South Korean soldiers during the Korean War. Nevertheless, when he encounters his younger brother again on the battlefield, this time on opposing sides, he ends up sacrificing his life and turning against the North Koreans to protect his younger brother's retreat. At the end of the film, Lee Jin-t'ae's (the older brother) dead body on the battlefield dissolves into his skeletal remains in the same position in the present-day, and younger brother Lee Jin-sök is left with the reality that he will never be reunited with his brother in life. He can only embrace the bones of his dead brother. Both museum and film texts begin their entry into the Korean War through the recovery of dead bodies and reunion of missing family members, specifically brothers. The ending phrase of the museum video, "Freedom is not free," reflects onto the glass floor, emphasizing the sacrifices and costs of war, as well as echoing the commander from *Taegukgi*.

The theme of brotherhood shows up in another prominent example at the War Memorial of Korea: the Statue of Brothers. The 11-meter tall Statue of Brothers depicts two soldiers embracing one another. One soldier is noticeably larger than his younger brother, with both standing upon a dome-shaped exhibition space<sup>33</sup> with a crack running through it into which visitors can enter. Depending on where the visitor enters the War Memorial of Korea complex, the Statue of Brothers can be one of the first or last stopping points in a visit.

The statue is emblematic of the theme of division and reconciliation, which is often represented symbolically through brothers separated and coming back together. The exhibit plaque for the Statue of Brothers reads:

The Statue of Brothers is an 18 meter wide and 11-meter high symbol of the Korean War. It consists of the upper part, lower part and inner part. The upper

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<sup>33</sup> Sheila Miyoshi Jager points out that the tomb is in the shape of a Silla-era burial mound, which is confirmed by the artist Choi Young-jeep: "My idea of using a (Silla) tomb as a pedestal was not intended to evoke the idea of death. On the contrary, it was intended to evoke ideas of hope and rebirth, the cycles of history, so to speak. The two brothers are reborn out of the womb and of the past to be one again in the future." Sheila Miyoshi Jager, "Monumental Histories: Manliness, the Military, and the War Memorial," *Public Culture* 14.2 (2002): 407.

part of the statue depicts a scene where a family's older brother, an ROK officer, and his younger brother, a North Korean soldier, meet in a battlefield and express reconciliation, love, and forgiveness. The lower tomb-shaped dome was built with pieces of granite collected from nationwide locations symbolizing the sacrifices made by our patriots. The crack in the dome stands for the division of Korea and the hope for reunification. Objects inside the dome include a mosaic wall painting that expresses the spirit of the Korean people to overcome the national tragedy and a map plate of the 16 UN Allied Nations that dispatched troops to the war. The links of iron chain on the ceiling signify the unbreakable bonds of a unified Korea.

The statue, as a symbol of the Korean War, embodies the themes of "reconciliation, love, and forgiveness," keywords that are not necessarily reflected within the museum space in the Korean War exhibits at the War Memorial of Korea.

Furthermore, Sheila Miyoshi Jager's critique of the Statue of Brothers places it within the politics of legitimacy that structure the Cold War and its afterlives by reading the body positions of the brothers as showcasing South Korean state legitimacy and broader claims of the state's inheritance of a unified Korean nationality and patriotic lineage. She writes:

...the meeting between brothers – one strong and one weak, one elder and the other younger – is portrayed in such a way that the genealogy of the ancestral bloodline is never questioned: South Korea is the elder son, the legitimate heir of Korea's patriotic warrior tradition, whose forgiveness of his weaker, wayward brother becomes the condition upon which North Korea is finally allowed to return to the "arms" of the family/nation.<sup>34</sup>

While the Statue of Brothers depicts South Korea as the older brother and North Korean as the younger, this is subverted within the film *Taegukgi*, as it is the older brother who defects to the north. The hypothetical meeting between two brothers on an imaginary Korean War battlefield portrayed in the statue also plays out differently from *Taegukgi*, which stages a similar meeting between brothers on a battlefield.

At first, the older brother, Lee Jin-tae attacks his younger brother, Lee Jin-seok, in a frenzy; in fact, this entire battlefield scene is particularly brutal as the North Korean and South Korean soldiers tend to brandish their guns as clubs and bayonets rather than firing them. This results in scenes of hand-to-hand combat that accentuate the brutal conditions of the battleground and the tragedy of brothers. On a metaphorical and literal level, the soldiers appear to be fighting amongst themselves for ideologies that seem increasingly muddled, themes that show up in 2000s South Korean cinema about the Korean War discussed in chapter 2.<sup>35</sup> Jin-tae cannot recognize his brother at first, but eventually comes to his senses as Jin-seok desperately attempts to drag him back to the south during the South Korean soldiers' retreat. Promising that he would be reunited with Jin-seok, Jin-tae turns his gun on the North Koreans and eventually dies on the battlefield. The transition back to the present happens as Jin-tae's dead body surrounded by artillery shells become nothing

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 405.

<sup>35</sup> This is supported by earlier scenes in which South Korean soldiers are also shown to commit particularly brutal war crimes and crimes against civilians.

but skeletal remains, leaving a devastated present-day Jin-seok to cry out upon their “reunion”: “I’ve waited for so long. What happened to your promise? Say something! I’ve been waiting to see you for 50 years.”

The hope and promise of reunification between two brothers is shown in three different yet similar ways in the museum, memorial, and film texts. The Statue of Brothers is a commentary upon South Korean political legitimacy during the Cold War, which extends to a legacy and inheritance of “Koreanness,” as well as symbolizes an imagined promise of reunification that does yet exist in reality, further examined in chapter 5. It is unclear if the battlefield on which the two brothers meet is a battlefield from the Korean War or a future war, but the promise of reconciliation and reunification is an imaginary scene culminating in a “loving embrace.”<sup>36</sup> The Statue of Brothers speaks to the affective aspects of the Korean War, and the devastating human costs of the war in which not just brothers, but also family members across generations were separated from one another.<sup>37</sup> The opening video and exhibit in the first Korean War room of the War Memorial of Korea portrays the repatriation of the body of Sergeant Lee Cheon Woo to the Seoul National Cemetery, interned next to his brother, as a reunion after 60 years; however, the reunion seems to ring hollow as both brothers were killed within months of each other in 1951 and are only able to be reunited through death and incorporation into the national military cemetery. Enveloped in the green letters making up the phrase “Freedom is not free,” the belated reunion of the two brothers after 60 years, when such a reunion was seemingly impossible in life outside of war, is enfolded into the logics of military sacrifice that make up the tone of the museum.

*Taegukgi*, on the other hand, questions the logics of reunification as reconciliation – reconciliation as in making meaning of the death of the brother – in its penultimate scene, as the reunion is portrayed as a crowning moment of tragedy and a failed promise. What good is reunification if it means the foreclosure of Jin-seok’s belief that his brother may still be alive somewhere in North Korea or elsewhere? While he is able to find closure for his brother’s death, it is at the expense of the broken promise of reunification. All three texts represent reconciliation and reunification of brothers in slightly different ways, yet what lingers is the repeating imagery that makes its way through Korean War memorial texts, from memorials to museums to films. The remain chapters of this dissertation continues to explore these themes – history and memory, reconciliation, imagined reunification, and temporality – in other memorial texts of the Korean War in the “post”-Cold War.

## Chapter Outlines

The first chapter takes up built space as corollary to popular culture representations of Korean War memory in relation to nationalism and transnationalism. It traces how discourses of freedom and gratitude to the U.S. and

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<sup>36</sup> Daniel Y. Kim, “Nationalist Technologies of Cultural Memory and the Korean War: Militarism and Neo-Liberalism in *The Price of Freedom* and the War Memorial of Korea,” *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review* 4.1 (May 2015): 55.

<sup>37</sup> See also Nan Youngnan Kim-Paik, *Liminal Subjects, Liminal Nation: Reuniting Families and Mediating Reconciliation in Divided Korea* (PhD diss.: University of California, Berkeley, 2007) and Soo-Jung Lee, *Making and Unmaking the Korean National Division: Separated Families in the Cold War and Post-Cold War Eras* (PhD diss.: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2006).

UN (in contrast to the 1990s-2000s Korean War films that displace the role of enemy from North Korea to the U.S. as the barrier to reunification) are represented and reconciled in the flagship war memorial complex in South Korea, the War Memorial of Korea in Seoul. These discourses, which draw transnationally from the Korean War Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., are then compared to the Nogunri Peace Park, which was the site of a U.S. massacre of Korean civilians during the first months of the war. How are memories of the U.S. as both liberator and perpetrator reconciled in museum and memorial space?

The second chapter focuses on contemporary South Korean cinema from the 1990s-2010s, coinciding with South Korean President Kim Dae-jung's "Sunshine Policy," which reflected a generally less hostile view towards North Korea and paved the way for inter-Korean exchanges such as the reunion of separated family members and the development of areas such as Kaesong in North Korea to anticipate future reunification. Thus, films of the period shifted as well to showcase Korean War narratives in which enemy combatants come together as friends or allies, although only temporarily, as the structures of Korean War and Cold War divisions ultimately make these relationships unsustainable. This chapter explores how these films depict these doomed friendships as well as how they memorialize the loss of friendship through cinematic techniques such as the freeze frame and the flashback. I also demonstrate how the films point to the U.S. as one of the architects of Korean division by subtly or overtly portraying the U.S. as enemies.

The third chapter examines post-2010s South Korean cinema about the Korean War. Extending from the thematic focus on memorialization and photography in the preceding chapter, this chapter focuses on the prevalence of archival images that begin to stand in for memory images. Why does contemporary South Korean cinema about the Korean War end with a photograph, archival memorial documentation, or memorialization of the main characters? Why is it necessary for these films to function as memorial texts, specifically using the photographic and archival index as a functional form of memorialization within film narratives? Films about the Korean War from the 2010s onwards shift from memorializing an imagined future or past that can never come to pass to using photographs, archival videos, or images as straightforward techniques to literally represent history, becoming memorials.

The fourth chapter focuses on the government-funded art collective REAL DMZ PROJECT to explore alternate methods of memorializing the Korean War and South Korean artist Minouk Lim's *Navigation ID*, which was exhibited at the 2014 Gwangju Biennale. The REAL DMZ PROJECT closely follows the itinerary of a security tourism trip in Cheorwon County in Gangwon-do, and focuses on various site-specific art exhibitions that provide critical interpretations of the Korean War and its legacies. Minouk Lim's *Navigation ID* is a powerful video, performance, and art piece that tracks two shipping containers filled with the remains of Bodo League massacre victims on their journey from individual family graves to the Gwangju Biennale space. The surviving family members of the massacres were then greeted by mothers of victims of the Gwangju Massacre in a public ceremony at the opening of the Biennale. What new insights about the Korean War can be gained by reading the historical events of the Bodo League Massacre in the summer of 1950 alongside the Gwangju Massacre (May 18<sup>th</sup> – May 27<sup>th</sup>, 1980)? How does the concept of Korean War memorialization gain new ground through the inter-referencing of multiple temporalities and spaces of the Korean War and state violence? Drawing from theories on the "ends" of the Cold War and the Korean War, this chapter explores the



overlapping temporalities that occur in the “locally specific” sites of the DMZ-bordering areas in which art, security tourism, museums, and memorials intersect and overlap, drawing attention to the messiness of memorializing a war not yet reconciled or resolved in the “post”-Cold War period.

The fifth chapter and conclusion considers the future of Korean War memorialization by exploring reunification memorials in South Korea that anticipate an event that has yet to occur. What does it mean to set aside space for memorialization of reunification in advance, even as it seems to inevitably be deferred into the future? While memorials are generally dedicated to past events and figures, the memorials that I focus on in this chapter are dedicated to an event that is yet to come. This chapter explores the various iconography of memorials used to signify division and reunification and reflects on the temporality of the Korean War and Cold War under continual division.

## Chapter 1

### **“Freedom is not free”: Tracing Transnational Korean War Discourses in the Post-Cold War Conjunction**

At the Korean War Veterans Memorial (hereafter: KWVM) in Washington, D.C., there are two memorial phrases that represent U.S. national memory of the Korean War. These phrases are “Freedom is not free” and “Our nation honors her sons and daughters, who answered the call to defend a country they never knew and a people they never met,” found on the wall and plaque of this memorial. These two phrases speak to U.S. understandings of the Korean War; while there are many local memorials that preceded the KWVM throughout the country,<sup>1</sup> the memorial’s particular location on the National Mall speaks to its position as part of the U.S. nation’s *lieux de mémoire*.<sup>2</sup>

Meanwhile, in South Korea, the representative war memorial complex in the heart of Seoul in the Yongsan District is the War Memorial of Korea (hereafter: WMK). While there are different memorial vocabularies at this museum complex, the same two phrases found at the KWVM are also found here.<sup>3</sup> “Freedom is not free” is on the entrance plaque and throughout the museum exhibitions, including the introductory film for the first Korean War exhibition room, and “Our nation honors...” is embossed on the outdoors wing of the museum, along lists of names of war dead for U.S. and UN soldiers, and also throughout the exhibition text. What is the significance of this transpacific travel of memorial phrases? And, what can these phrases reveal about the broader Cold War memorialization tactics and dialectics of remembering and forgetting in both the U.S. and South Korea in the post-Cold War conjunction? Specifically, post-Cold War memory is not just a force but also processes with transpacific connections, actors, and mobilities that move beyond the boundaries of the nation-state, and thus necessitate transpacific Asian American critique.

Phrases that appear at the KWVM and that reappear in South Korean memorials emphasize the necessity of gratitude for and indebtedness to U.S. (and UN) military sacrifices for attaining what Asian American Studies scholar Mimi Thi

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<sup>1</sup> Levi Fox, *Not Forgotten: The Korean War in American Public Memory, 1950-2017* (PhD diss.: Temple University, 2018).

<sup>2</sup> Pierre Nora writes that “*lieux de mémoire* originate with the sense that there is no spontaneous memory, that we must deliberately create archives, maintain anniversaries, organize celebrations, pronounce eulogies, and notarize bills because such activities no longer occur naturally” and that “without commemorative vigilance, history would soon sweep them away.” Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire,” *Representations* no. 26, Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory (Spring 1989): 12. Elsewhere, Erika Doss describes the U.S. context in which there existed a rush of memorial planning and construction since the 1990s as “memorial mania.” Erika Doss, *Memorial Mania: Public Feeling in America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> In particular, “fatherland/patriot” (*hoguk*) and “war hero” (*yŏngŭn*) are prominently featured keywords throughout the memorial complex. Sheila Miyoshi Jager also points out “solidarity,” “unity,” “strength,” and “trust” as behind-the-scenes vocabularies in the planning documents. Sheila Miyoshi Jager, “Monumental Histories: Manliness, the Military, and the War Memorial,” *Public Culture* 14.2 (Spring 2002): 387-409.

Nguyen refers to as the “gift of freedom.”<sup>4</sup> The “gift of freedom” constitutes not only the results of Cold War (attaining freedom for other nations), but also the justification for waging liberal war in the first place (wars fought on behalf of freedom). Furthermore, Jodi Kim connects settler modernity with militarization (specifically in Asia and the Pacific) to make an argument about the role of debt as both a structure of relations and an “instrument of violence” between the U.S. as creditor/debtor nation and other countries as debtors to the U.S.<sup>5</sup> As Kim writes, “Militarization exceeds the temporal parameters of war, the spatial demarcations of military bases, the functional ends of military institutions, and the enlistment of military personnel.”<sup>6</sup> However, the “gift of freedom” blurs not only reason and result, but also the temporality that leads to continual and unending military alliances and relations with the U.S. Freedom is not only gift but also debt. In the circular relationship that constructs Cold War and post-Cold War relations between the U.S. and its allies and territories in the Asia-Pacific, freedom is the currency exchanged and the costs for continuing militarization in the region, as well as the results of “victory.”

Within this theoretical conversation, I specifically focus on memorial cultures in relation to this “gift-debt” structure and how discourses of gratitude and sacrifice travel across both U.S. and South Korean memorial contexts. I am particularly invested in the “gift-debt” relation between the U.S. and South Korea in the post-Cold War conjuncture within national and popular cultures of commemoration of the Korean War. The Korean War is not just a static temporal event that took place from June 25<sup>th</sup>, 1950 – July 27<sup>th</sup>, 1953; the war itself is part of the “regimes of militarism” that “generates a proliferation of military logics beyond formal military institutes and sites, and beyond the war-making, peacemaking, and security functions of the military itself.”<sup>7</sup> I read memorialization and memorial cultures in South Korea as directly engaging with and part of the “regimes of militarism” that exceed the temporal event of the Korean War itself.

Particularly, South Korea, as a nation that has been both liberated by the U.S. and a debtor nation as a result of U.S. military projects in WWII and the Cold War, necessarily is embroiled in the politics of national liberation and legitimacy politics stemming from the results of these conflicts.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, South Korea and the Korean War, while a locally specific civil war within the global Cold War,<sup>9</sup> is also simultaneously interlocked in networks of U.S. militarism across Asia and the Pacific, as well as the Middle East<sup>10</sup> and other “frontiers” of U.S. imperialism.<sup>11</sup> As Kim

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<sup>4</sup> Mimi Thi Nguyen, *The Gift of Freedom: War, Debt, and Other Refugee Passages* (Durham: Duke University, 2012).

<sup>5</sup> Jodi Kim, “Settler Modernity, Debt Imperialism, and the Necropolitics of the Promise,” *Social Text* 36.2 (2018): 41-61.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 51.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 52-53.

<sup>8</sup> Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War, Volume 1: Liberation and the Emergence of Separate Regimes, 1945-1947* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981).

<sup>9</sup> For discussion of the locally specific Cold War, see especially Heonik Kwon, *The Other Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press) and Masuda Hajimu, *Cold War Crucible: The Korean Conflict and the Postwar World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015).

<sup>10</sup> Jodi Kim, “Settler Modernity, Debt Imperialism, and the Necropolitics of the Promise,” *Social Text* 36.2 (2018): 41-61.

demonstrates, “U.S. debt imperialism” and its necropolitics create both the conditions of, as well as justification for, incurred debt among “liberated” countries<sup>12</sup> – “the gift of freedom.”<sup>13</sup> Here, the gift is simultaneously a debt, as freedom is both result and justification for entering wars in Asia in the first place, and for maintaining military installations in the region and in the Pacific.<sup>14</sup> In fact, Korean War memorialization often blurs this connection between freedom as result and justification, and this can be shown specifically through the transpacific connections and discourses found in both U.S. and South Korean memorial spaces.

Through tracing the discourses of freedom in U.S. and South Korean memorials about the Korean War, I show how war memorials in the U.S. and South Korea attempt to reconcile memory of the war through the repetition of key memorial phrases. Reconciliation is the action or act of bringing things to an agreement; in the museum and memorial context, it is a suturing of histories and memories into coherent narratives, simultaneously a method against forgetting yet also analogous to forgetting in its creation of new narratives, depending on the context of the narratives and memories created in processes of memorialization. In this attempt at reconciliation and making sense of conflict for the purposes of memorialization, both the “Forgotten War”<sup>15</sup> and “Forgotten Victory”<sup>16</sup> discourses in the U.S. create new “forgettings.” After all, the “victory” of this war is a belated one – connected to South

<sup>11</sup> Chih-ming Wang and Yu-Fang Cho, “Introduction: The Chinese Factor and American Studies, Here and Now,” *American Quarterly* 69.3 (September 2017): 443-463.

<sup>12</sup> Jodi Kim, “Settler Modernity, Debt Imperialism, and the Necropolitics of the Promise,” *Social Text* 36.2 (2018): 41-61.

<sup>13</sup> Mimi Thi Nguyen, *The Gift of Freedom: War, Debt, and Other Refugee Passages* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012).

<sup>14</sup> See especially Bridget Martin, “From Camp Town to International City: US Military Base Expansion and Local Development in Pyeongtaek, South Korea,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 42.6 (November 2018): 967-985 and Setsu Shigematsu and Keith L. Camacho, eds., *Militarized Currents: Toward a Decolonized Future in Asia and the Pacific* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

<sup>15</sup> The Korean War has often been referred to as the “Forgotten War” in U.S. contexts by historians and veterans of the war, particularly in comparison to WWII and the Vietnam War, which have seen more representation, especially in popular culture. See Suhi Choi, *Embattled Memories: Contesting Meanings in Korean War Memorials* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2014). As she has pointed out, there are multiple reasons for why the Korean War has gained this moniker in the U.S.: “The question of why the war has been forgotten can invite many plausible speculations: the unclear ending of the war, its sandwiched timing of occurrence between two major wars, its unpopularity in the mass media, the constraint of Cold War ideology, and the closed dialogues between South and North Korea” (Ibid, 74). Rather than as the “Forgotten” or the “Unknown War,” it is clear that from the position of critical Asian American memorial studies, U.S. wars in Asia continue to matter for the lived realities of Asian/Korean Americans and the Korean diaspora.

<sup>16</sup> It is difficult to pinpoint exactly if there was a shift from “Forgotten War” to “Forgotten Victory” in U.S. discourses, but the Korean War National Museum’s website (now defunct with the museum’s closing in 2017) had referred to the Korean War as the “forgotten victory.” (The museum was established in 1997 in Springfield, IL). Both U.S. and South Korean contexts refer to the Korean War as “Forgotten Victory” in the context of containment of communism to only North Korea and attainment of freedom for South Korea.

Korea's status as one of the leading economies in the Asia-Pacific region since the 1970s-1980s and a "vibrant democracy" since the 1990s, long after the "end" of the war in 1953. In the long-term contestation for Cold War legitimacy, it can be argued that South Korea has indeed emerged "victorious."<sup>17</sup> Yet, on a larger conceptual level, reconciliation is a memory technique engaged in gift/debt relations between South Korea and the U.S., and a manifestation of "U.S. debt imperialism."<sup>18</sup>

I begin with clarifying the concept of critical Asian American memorial studies as a reading methodology and critical genealogy. Then, I provide an analysis of the Korean War Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. Following, I trace the repetitions of Korean War memorial phrases from the KWVM in South Korean memorial contexts and introduce the transnational nature of memorial discourse, paying particular attention to the War Memorial of Korea, the flagship war memorial in South Korea. Specifically, I follow how affective registers of freedom and gratitude are deployed in South Korean contexts to illuminate processes of forgetting and remembering in national and local memorialization.

As tracing discourses of freedom and gratitude in South Korean memorials and museums necessitates a privileging of nationalist spaces in which reconciliation of historical narratives work to either suppress or minimize counter-readings or counter-memorials (a form of forgetting), I conclude by asking, what happens when affective discourses of freedom and gratitude rub up against memoryscapes of wartime civilian massacre,<sup>19</sup> particularly those directly perpetrated by U.S. soldiers during the Korean War? To this extent, I analyze the Nogunri Peace Park in order to understand how concepts of truth and reconciliation in this peace memorial complex cohere, as well as fail to cohere, with war memorial phrases such as "freedom is not free." In this peace memorial, reconciliation and justice are reasons and results for memorialization, mirroring the concept of "freedom" in war memorial spaces. In its attempt to bring peace and closure for past atrocities to the present, the Nogunri Peace Park is emblematic of irresolutions inherently found in projects of memorialization and the failure of reconciling history and justice when the perpetrators of civilian massacres become blurred with notions of the perpetrators as saviors.

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<sup>17</sup> Ironically, this is also the basis upon which North Korea and China can claim victory as well, particularly through the framework of resistance to U.S. imperialism. This is reflected in the names for the Korean War in North Korea and China: "Fatherland Liberation War" and "War to Resist America and Aid Korea."

<sup>18</sup> Jodi Kim, "Settler Modernity, Debt Imperialism, and the Necropolitics of the Promise," *Social Text* 36.2 (2018): 41-61.

<sup>19</sup> Wartime civilian massacres have been discussed extensively in literature, particularly in South Korea after the democratization of the country in 1988 and into the 1990s. Specifically, for more information on the Nogunri Massacre and interviews with survivors see Suhi Choi, *Embattled Memories: Contested Meanings in Korean War Memorials* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2014) and *The Korean War caught in history and memory: Examining United States media coverage of the No Gun Ri incident (1999-present) and Korean survivors' testimonies* (PhD diss.: Temple University, 2006). The Nogunri Peace Park and Peace Foundation has published a report with findings, data about the incident, and the process by which the memorial came to be constructed through the passing of a special law in 2004 in the absence of official compensation from the U.S. See also Suhi Choi, "Can a Memorial Communicate Embodied Trauma?: Reenacting Civilian Bodies in the No Gun Ri Peace Park," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 19.3 (Fall 2016): 465-489.

Various modes of reconciliation within memoryscapes of the Korean War become entangled with one another, pointing to spaces of rupture and alternative critical readings of Korean War memorialization beyond dichotomies of “remembering” and “forgetting.” To this extent, I examine how critical Asian American memorial studies as methodology to study memorialization can bring out transnational narratives and allow for the multiple subjectivities of museum/memorial visitors to disrupt and enable readings beyond Cold War frameworks and dialectics of gratitude and debt. In doing so, the critical project of this chapter and dissertation is to show how the Korean War is not just one-dimensionally the “Forgotten War,” but also how memorialization of the Korean War, as a method of reconciling the unending war in a “post”-Cold War period, is the very condition for how the Korean War has come to be understood as “forgotten” in the U.S. context.

### **Critical Asian American Memorial Studies: Reading Methodology and Genealogy for Analyzing Korean War Memorialization**

My reading and study of memorial cultures in the U.S. and South Korea are informed by Asian American cultural studies scholars who not only delineated the gift-debt relationship formed by U.S. militarism, but also take into account Asian American subject formations created by U.S. empire.<sup>20</sup> From “freedom is not free” to the phrase referenced by Asian American Studies scholars that “we are here because you were there,”<sup>21</sup> these are discourses that are not entirely negative constructions, because through the new subject formations engendered by these discourses, there arise the possibility of alternative readings and imaginings of U.S. empire, particularly through cultural critique and cultural productions.<sup>22</sup> Rather than enacting critiques of

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<sup>20</sup> Some of these scholars include Victor Bascara, *Model-Minority Imperialism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006); Vernadette Vicuña Gonzalez, *Securing Paradise: Tourism and Militarism in Hawai'i and the Philippines* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013); Jodi Kim, *Ends of Empire: Asian American Critique and the Cold War* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010); Jodi Kim, “Settler Modernity, Debt Imperialism, and the Necropolitics of the Promise,” *Social Text* 36.2 (2018): 41-61; Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Mimi Thi Nguyen, *The Gift of Freedom: War, Debt, and Other Refugee Passages* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012).

<sup>21</sup> The phrase is not directly coined by Asian American Studies scholars; however, I use it in the context of recognition of U.S. wars in Asia that directly and indirectly affected Asian immigration to the U.S. (while recognizing that this phrase can also speak to other colonial and neocolonial contexts). As Daniel Y. Kim and Viet Thanh Nguyen write, “The Asian presence in America that is signaled by the works we discuss affirms the motto, *we are here because you were there*; the Asian American sensibilities expressed in these writings emerge from diasporic communities that have been forged by U.S. military violence and revolutionary conflict in their homelands.” Daniel Y. Kim and Viet Thanh Nguyen, “The Literature of the Korean War and Vietnam War” in *The Cambridge Companion to Asian American Literature*, edited by Crystal Parikh and Daniel Y. Kim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015): 59.

<sup>22</sup> In particular, see Kuan-Hsing Chen, *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); Jodi Kim, *Ends of Empire: Asian American Critique and the Cold War* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010); Heonik Kwon, *The Other Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010); Lisa Lowe,

U.S. militarism and imperialism as arguments based on foreclosure – for example, that there is nothing that can be done beyond just recognizing that these are powerful social structures and gaining some illumination from the recognition that the U.S. is not unilaterally benevolent or a giver of freedom without any strings attached<sup>23</sup> – I explore how the new subject formations that emerge from this critique can have life of their own as well. This is the radical potentiality of Asian American critique.

Furthermore, I approach Asian American cultural critique as not only an intellectual genealogy,<sup>24</sup> but also methodology. In working with the enduring legacies of the Korean War and Cold War, I also align myself with scholars like Heonik Kwon, who examines the ends of the Cold War, particularly the “locally specific”

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*Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

<sup>23</sup> While this is not the focus of this dissertation, it is important to recognize that Cold War power structures were indeed contested and maintained by countries on the receiving sides of U.S. Cold War aid. In other words, it is important to recognize the agency of gift-receiving countries as well. For more scholarship on this see: John DiMoia, “Atoms for Sale?: Cold War Institution-Building and the South Korean Atomic Energy Project, 1945-1965,” *Technology and Culture* 51.3 (July 2010): 589-618; John DiMoia, “In Pursuit of ‘Peace and Construction’: Hyundai Construction and Infrastructure in Southeast Asia, 1965-1973,” in *Engineering Asia: Technology, Colonial Development, and the Cold War Order*, edited by Hiromi Mizuno, Aaron S. Moore, and John DiMoia (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018); James Lin, “Sowing Seeds and Knowledge: Agricultural Development in Taiwan and the World, 1925-1975,” *East Asian Science, Technology and Society* 9.2 (2015): 127-149; Masuda Hajimu, *Cold War Crucible: The Korean Conflict and the Postwar World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015); Dongmin Park, *Free World, Cheap Buildings: U.S. Hegemony and the Origins of Modern Architecture in South Korea, 1953-1960* (PhD diss.: University of California, Berkeley, 2016).

<sup>24</sup> Victor Bascara, *Model-Minority Imperialism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006); Mark Chiang, *The Cultural Capital of Asian American Studies: Autonomy and Representation in the University* (New York: New York University Press, 2009); Kandice Chuh, *Imagine Otherwise: On Asian Americanist Critique* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); Vernadette Vicuña Gonzalez, *Securing Paradise: Tourism and Militarism in Hawai‘i and the Philippines* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013); Allan Punzalan Isaac, *American Tropics: Articulating Filipino America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006); Laura Kang, *Compositional Subjects: Enfiguring Asian/American Women* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002); Elaine H. Kim, *Asian American Literature: An Introduction to the Writings and their Social Context* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982); Elaine H. Kim and Lisa Lowe, “Guest Editor’s Introduction,” *positions* 5.2 (Special Issue: New Formations, New Questions: Asian American Studies) (Fall 1997): v-xiv; Jodi Kim, *Ends of Empire: Asian American Critique and the Cold War* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010); Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Mimi Thi Nguyen, *The Gift of Freedom: War, Debt, and Other Refugee Passages* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012); Caroline Chung Simpson, *An Absent Presence: Japanese Americans in Postwar American Culture, 1945-1960* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001); Lisa Yoneyama, *Cold War Ruins: Transpacific Critique of American Justice and Japanese War Crimes* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016); Ji-Yeon Yuh, *Beyond the Shadow of Camptown: Korean Military Brides in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2002); Ji-Yeon Yuh, “Moved by War: Migration, Diaspora, and the Korean War,” *Journal of Asian American Studies* 8.3 (October 2005): 277-291.

sites of hot wars within the broader Cold War period.<sup>25</sup> Examining the “ends”<sup>26</sup> of the Cold War and Korean War necessarily entails looking into memorialization practices as well, and to ask the question of, how do memorial texts reconcile an unfinished war in a so-called “post”-Cold War period? While the museum and memorial texts examined in this chapter can be read as sites of nationalism, conservatism, or universalism, reading these texts from the vantage point of Asian American cultural critique can bring to light new questions in relation to memorial form and memorialization techniques within Korean War memoryscapes.

Furthermore, Asian American cultural critique intersects with scholarship on Cold War subject formations in Asia. For example, Chen Kuan-Hsing gives space to theorizing Cold War subjectivities as a starting point, methodological approach, and intervention; particularly, he points to the possibilities that arise from “inter-referencing” conditions in Cold War and “post”-Cold War (East) Asian contexts.<sup>27</sup> He writes:

The effects of the cold war have become embedded in local history, and simply pronouncing the war to be over will not cause them to dissolve. The complex effects of the war, mediated through our bodies, have been inscribed into our national, family, and personal histories. In short, the cold war is still alive within us.<sup>28</sup>

Jodi Kim makes a similar argument, from the framework of Asian American cultural critique, in writing of the “double injunction” for Korean Americans in regards to memory of the Korean War: “to forget (as assimilated Americans) and to remember (as gendered racial Korean immigrants and postimperial ‘exiles’).”<sup>29</sup> Kim points to the complicated discourses within Asian/Korean America as also contributing another perspective to the Korean War as “forgotten war,” as tension exists between the will to remember and recognition of the reason for immigration to the U.S. (which Kim refers to as a “dirty secret”<sup>30</sup> for Korean Americans) and the need to forget in order to

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<sup>25</sup> Heonik Kwon, *The Other Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

<sup>26</sup> Jodi Kim defines “ends” as a concept that is temporal, spatial, functional, and alluding to “fragments and remnants.” Jodi Kim, *Ends of Empire: Asian American Critique and the Cold War* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010): 4. Heonik Kwon points to the Cold War as a process of “slow decomposition.” Heonik Kwon, *The Other Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010). For a theory of ruins in relation to colonialism, see Ann Laura Stoler, ed., *Imperial Debris: On Ruins and Ruination* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).

<sup>27</sup> Kuan-Hsing Chen, *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 118.

<sup>29</sup> Jodi Kim, *Ends of Empire: Asian American Critique and the Cold War* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010): 146.

<sup>30</sup> The “dirty secret” is that “the majority of Korean America’s post-1945 formation can be attributed to chain migrations set into motion by Korean military brides who sponsored (extended) family members but who were shunned for marrying ‘foreigners,’ especially when those foreigners were black Americans” (Ibid). See also Ji-Yeon Yuh, *Beyond the Shadow of Camptown: Korean Military Brides in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2002) for more on the history and lives of Korean military brides. Grace M. Cho traces the ghostly specter of the “yanggongju” (“Western/Yankee



become “proper” U.S. subjects or “model minority subjects.”<sup>31</sup> This “double injunction” and “cold war is still alive within us” points not only to the importance of Asian American subjectivity in the “post”-cold war but also to how dialectics of remembering and forgetting are constitutive of Asian American cultural productions and politics in this cultural conjunction.

As Elaine H. Kim writes,

What most Americans know about Korea has been told from the point of view of a U.S. military member or a missionary, about prostitutes, beggars, and orphans, many of them mixed race children, never speaking but always spoken for and about, souls being saved by the civilizing missions of neocolonialism and evangelism. No doubt they would have found it difficult to imagine that one day the voice of the native, having returned to the imperial center, might speak back – in English – from its very different positionality.<sup>32</sup>

This speaks to the potential of Asian American cultural critique and cultural productions to question Cold War binaries and non/alignments. Korean Americans, and by extension Asian Americans who have also been affected by cold war/hot war migrations, exile, forced displacement or adoption, and refugeehood, are not just objects for study (as is often the case for fields that emerge from Cold War national security concerns such as most “area studies”) but have subjectivities and positionalities that can “speak back” (or even “speak for”<sup>33</sup> empire).<sup>34</sup> These sentiments can be found in the adage “We are here because you were there,” which traces the conditions of possibility for migration to the U.S. to U.S. imperialism and neocolonialism, whether through direct processes such as war or colonialism, or through indirect cultural processes such as soft power domination of U.S. popular

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princess,” the pejorative name used by Koreans to refer to women who work in U.S. military camptowns as prostitutes as well as women who associate with U.S. soldiers or civilians) through “postmemory” autoethnography from the lens of secondary or intergenerational trauma marked by silence, shame, and secrecy. Grace M. Cho, *Haunting the Korean Diaspora: Shame, Secrecy, and the Forgotten War* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

<sup>31</sup> Ellen D. Wu, *The Color of Success: Asian Americans and the Origins of the Model Minority* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

<sup>32</sup> Elaine H. Kim, “Myth, Memory and Desire: Homeland and History in Contemporary Korean American Writing and Visual Art” in *Holding Their Own: Perspectives on the Multi-Ethnic Literatures of the United States*, edited by Dorothea Fischer-Hornung and Heike Raphael-Hernandez (Tubingen, Germany: Stauffenberg-Verlag, 2000).

<sup>33</sup> See especially the chapter “Race Wars, Patriot Wars” in Mimi Thi Nguyen, *The Gift of Freedom: War, Debt, and Other Refugee Passages* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012).

<sup>34</sup> Kuan-Hsing Chen, *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); Yên Lê Espiritu, *Body Counts: The Vietnam War and Militarized Freedom: War, Debt, and Other Refugee Passages* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012); Mimi Thi Nguyen, *The Gift of Freedom: War, Debt, and Other Refugee Passages* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012); Hairong Yang and David Vukovich, “Guest Editor’s Introduction: What’s Left of Asia,” *positions: east asia cultures critique* 15.2 (Fall 2007): 211-224; Ji-Yeon Yuh, “Moved by War: Migration, Diaspora, and the Korean War,” *Journal of Asian American Studies* 8.3 (October 2005): 277-291.

culture.<sup>35</sup> This critique and recognition of Asian American diaspora that can be seen as “refuge migrations”<sup>36</sup> fills in a critical gap in Chen Kuan-Hsing’s book, which does not include engagement with Asian American scholarship. What types of possibilities could emerge from “inter-referencing” not just Taiwan with Korea as in Chen’s text, but “Asian America” with “(East) Asia” in the critical project of “de-cold war”? Chen lays out the process of “de-cold war” as entailing a need to “de-Americanize”:

To de-cold war in East Asia, it will be necessary to reverse the trend of leaving Asia for America, which has been the dominant tendency during the postwar era. Now, the trend must become leaving America for Asia. At this historically critical time, to de-cold war is to de-Americanize. This means to examine the consequences of the United States’ role as a central component in the formation of East Asian subjectivity.<sup>37</sup>

What would it mean for the process of “de-cold war,” in the East Asian context, to encounter Asian American critique? Does “leaving America” (epistemologically, methodologically, literally) necessarily mean leaving Asian America?

These questions can be answered through returning to the relation between memory and subjectivity in Asian American critique. For example, Victor Bascara writes that “Asian American cultural politics unburdens the emergences of U.S. imperialism and thereby burdens the present with a past it once needed to forget.”<sup>38</sup> Lisa Lowe has also written specifically of the distinctiveness of contemporary (post-1965) immigration to the U.S.:

Another distinguishing feature of the post-1965 Asian immigration is the predominance of immigrants from South Korea, the Philippines, South Vietnam, and Cambodia, countries deeply affected by U.S. colonialism, war, and neocolonialism. Despite the usual assumption that Asians immigrate from stable, continuous, “traditional” cultures, most of the post-1965 Asian immigrants come from societies already disrupted by colonialism and distorted by the upheavals of neocolonial capitalism and war. The material legacy of the repressed history of U.S. imperialism in Asia is borne out in the “return” of Asian immigrants to the imperial center. In this sense, these Asian Americans are determined by the history of U.S. involvements in Asia *and* the historical racialization of Asians in the United States....Once here, the demand that Asian immigrants identify as U.S. national subjects simultaneously produces alienations and disidentifications out of which critical subjectivities emerge.

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<sup>35</sup> Victor Bascara, *Model-Minority Imperialism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

<sup>36</sup> Ji-Yeon Yuh defines “refuge migrations” as “those seeking refuge from the consequences of the Korean War. This migration – although spurred by the nationalist struggle embodied in the war and division – leads to community and identity configurations that rely on shared memory and experience rather than nation-state ties.” Ji-Yeon Yuh, “Moved by War: Migration, Diaspora, and the Korean War,” *Journal of Asian American Studies* 8.3 (October 2005): 277-291.

<sup>37</sup> Kuan-Hsing Chen, *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010): 365.

<sup>38</sup> Victor Bascara, *Model-Minority Imperialism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006): xvii.

These immigrants retain precisely the memories of imperialism that the U.S. nation seeks to forget.<sup>39</sup>

The emergence of “critical subjectivities” mirrors Chen Kuan-Hsing’s assertion that the “cold war is still alive within us” while also complicating the need to leave “Asia for America.” Memory<sup>40</sup> and “critical subjectivities” borne out of experiences of migration, war, imperialism, and colonialism cannot be constrained by the bounds of the nation-state or even of disciplinarity.<sup>41</sup> The tensions that arise from the “double injunction” of forgetting and remembering, and assimilating or resisting or refusing, give rise to new “critical subjectivities.” Thus, I utilize ‘critical Asian American memorial studies’ as methodology to read Korean War memorialization in the “post”-Cold War conjuncture.

### **“Forgotten No More”: The Korean War Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C.**

Upon first glance, the Korean War Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., located on the National Mall, seems to reference the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall (hereafter VVMW) with its usage of black reflective walls, a common

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<sup>39</sup> Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006): 16-17.

<sup>40</sup> In the context of Korean War memorialization, the issue of temporality has played a major theoretical concern as Korean War memorials attempt to reconcile the unending Korean War with nationalist claims of an ended Cold War. For a laying out of these theoretical concerns and an intervention in the form of analyzing memorial texts, see Suzy Kim and the special issue on “(De)Memorializing the Korean War: A Critical Intervention” and the individual essays that read various national memorials in conversation with one another. Suzy Kim, “Introduction to ‘(De)Memorializing the Korean War: A Critical Intervention,’” *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review* 14 (March 2015): 51-62; Keun-Sik Jung, “China’s Memory and Commemoration of the Korean War in the Memorial to Resist America and Aid (North) Korea,” *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review* 14 (March 2015): 63-90; Daniel Y. Kim, “Nationalist Technologies of Cultural Memory and the Korean War: Militarism and Liberalism in ‘The Price of Freedom’ and the War Memorial of Korea,” *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review* (March 2015): 91-123; Suzy Kim, “Specters of War in Pyongyang: The Victorious Fatherland Liberation War Museum in North Korea,” *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review* (March 2015): 124-151; Sunghoon Han, “The Ongoing Korean War at the Sinch’ŏn Museum in North Korea,” *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review* (March 2015): 152-177; Seunghei Clara Hong, “Silenced in Memoriam: Consuming Memory at the Nogŭnri Peace Park,” *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review* (March 2015): 178-203; Brendan Wright, “Politicial Violence and the Problematics of Localized Memory at Civilian Massacre Sites: The Cheju 4.3 Peace Park and the Kŏch’ang Incident Memorial Park,” *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review* (March 2015): 204-233. Other special issues of journals have addressed the Korean War and the issue of temporality, especially the special issue on “The Unending Korean War” in *positions* journal, edited by Christine Hong. See Christine Hong, “The Unending Korean War,” *positions: asia critique* 23.4 (Fall 2015): 597-617.

<sup>41</sup> Laura Kang, *Compositional Subjects: Enfiguring Asian/American Women* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).

representational strategy for war memorials since the impact of Maya Lin's influential design. After all, the construction of the KWVM was somewhat belated – it was dedicated on July 27, 1955, 42 years after the end of the Korean War and 13 years after the opening of the VVMW in 1982 (the Vietnam War ending in 1975). Therefore, the design of the KWVM, to a certain extent, had to respond to the design of the VVMW as it was the next major war memorial to be built on the National Mall.<sup>42</sup>

Specifically, the Korean War Veterans Memorial Wall consists of two parts: a black wall separated into two sections<sup>43</sup> and on the opposite side of the wall, nineteen statues of soldiers from various branches of the military and representing different ethnicities. The walkway for visitors follows a “V”-shaped path. The first segment of the wall consists of sandblasted photographic images of soldiers and other support military personnel including women, which are meant to be representative images of people who took part in the war. The images are slightly indented and touching of the memorial is allowed. The surface of this wall is reflective. The second segment of the wall consists solely of an etching in the same reflective material, which reads “Freedom is not free.” The memorial gradually becomes shorter as it reaches closer to the Pool of Remembrance, where the “Freedom is not free” wall segment rests in.

However, the most unique aspects of the memorial are the nineteen larger-than-life soldier statues. Unlike the more realistic Three Soldiers statue or the Vietnam Women's memorial statue at the VVMF, the vague impressionistic facial features (particularly the eyes) of the gray Korean War memorial soldier statues and their accompanying military ponchos give off the appearance of ghosts. They are not presented as conventionally heroic, as most of the faces on the soldiers seem to register fear, confusion, or anger. Kristin Hass describes the statues in similar ways:

The figures' faces are not uniform, like the language of the inscriptions, and they are not generic. They are hollow-eyed, tense, and often contorted. They are, in fact, painful to look at. The rough finish, the blank eyes, the sheer bulk of them, the distracted scatter of their postures – all make the figures both powerfully present and hard to read. Their ghostly, sometimes twisted faces are

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<sup>42</sup> Kristin Ann Hass, *Sacrificing Soldiers on the National Mall* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013): 21. See also CFA 26/JUL/89-1, Korean War Veterans Memorial, between the Reflecting Pool and Independence Avenue, S.W., Ash Woods, near Lincoln Memorial. Preliminary design. Specifically, the document states that “There were five major points made in the statement of concept: (1) The Korean War was waged in the cause of freedom; (2) Unlike Vietnam, there was a victory in geo-political terms; (3) The memorial will pay homage to all those who participated; (4) While Korea will be the focus, tribute will also be paid to those who served in all wars; (5) Although the memorial will be American, it will also recognize the contributions of the United Nations forces.”

<sup>43</sup> Kristin Ann Hass describes three major design elements instead of two: the soldiers, the wall running parallel to the soldiers, and the Pool of Remembrance with the other wall. Kristin Ann Hass, *Sacrificing Soldiers on the National Mall* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013): 24-25. I consider the two reflective walls together because in all my visits to the KWVM, I have never seen the Pool of Remembrance filled with water due to various construction or maintenance issues.

remarkably moving – they seem to express not platitudes but something of the anguish of the soldiers’ experience.<sup>44</sup>

As a whole, the soldiers are not meant to be engaged with: the area where they are is roped off so that visitors can only approach them from a distance, unlike the wall.<sup>45</sup> The sense of distance is not just a physical distancing of spectator from object, but there also appears to be a temporal distancing as well, which is indicated by the stances of the soldiers: they look paused or interrupted as if they were in the middle of a mission, simultaneously in their own time (as if they were still in Korea) and out of time in a sterile museum-like way (visitors cannot engage with them except to take photographs or to look). The soldiers retain a quality of powerlessness not only because of their inability to see,<sup>46</sup> which adds to the impression that the soldiers are not conventionally heroic statues, but also the “empty eyes” of the statues speak to their existing on a different temporal plane. Although they are on the same spatial plane as visitors to the memorial, the impression of the statues existing within a different time gives them an additive ghostly presence.

Furthermore, whether intentional or not, the statues poignantly speak to the Korean War as a “stalemated” or ongoing war, as representations of its inconclusive ending. After all, what also makes these statues ghost-like is conveyed by the memorial architecture – the statues are reflected in the opposite walls. The superimposition of the visitors’ faces in the reflective surface of the wall along with the statues of the soldiers and the sandblasted faces all create a blurring of temporalities between the soldiers seemingly “stuck” in the past and the spectators’ present positionality, creating a ghostly superimposed image. Furthermore, the choice of nineteen soldiers is intentional – by looking at the reflection of the statues in the wall, there will be a total of thirty-eight soldiers, which alludes to the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel that initially divided the Korean peninsula into North Korea and South Korea. While using nineteen soldiers was in part logistical (it was decided that thirty-eight soldiers would create for a too cluttered memorial site<sup>47</sup>), the symbolic gesture of including the 38<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 27.

<sup>45</sup> This is different from the initial winning design proposal in which “the visitor would have the feeling of being part of the memorial as he walked between the figures, moving toward the horizon.” CFA 26/JUL/89-1, Korean War Veterans Memorial, between the Reflecting Pool and Independence Avenue, S.W., Ash Woods, near Lincoln Memorial. Preliminary design. For a detailed description of the Korean War Veterans Memorial design process see also Patrick Hagopian, “The Korean War Veterans Memorial and Problems of Representation,” *Public Art Dialogue* 2.2 (2012): 215-253. My visit to the archives of the Fine Arts Commission in Washington, D.C. and the National Archives and Records Center in Suitland, Maryland in August 2017 confirms the information laid out in Hagopian’s article.

<sup>46</sup> “The soldiers, to be honored, to be finally remember, have no capacity to *look*.” Kristin Ann Hass, *Sacrificing Soldiers on the National Mall* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013): 27.

<sup>47</sup> The official website of the KWVM explains that the reflection that creates 38 soldiers not only represents the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel but also the 38 months the U.S. spent fighting the war: <http://www.koreanwarvetsememorial.org/memorial?from=national>. I first learned of the logistical problems of having 38 soldier statues at the memorial site from Duery Felton, the curator of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Collection, in 2012 on a research trip. While Mr. Felton was showing me around the Landover National Park facility in

Parallel within the memorial space is particularly striking as it alludes to the continual division of the peninsula along the Military Demarcation Line<sup>48</sup> and surrounding Demilitarized Zones (DMZ) in what are now two separate countries, North Korea and South Korea.<sup>49</sup> Not representing one side of the division except through reflection speaks to how the discourse of North Korea exists in both the U.S. and South Korea as a “ghostly other.”<sup>50</sup>

Furthermore, the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel is displaced in this context from its material realities on the Korean Peninsula to a metaphorical division of U.S. soldiers in order to make up a whole. The metaphorical division in this memorial is not a division at all, but rather a mirror that constructs a whole – uniting the soldiers together along with the other faces on the wall and presumably joining together with the memorial visitors’ own faces. In this way, the memorial functions as a literal evocation of the processes of reconciliation that are found in projects of memorialization: the mirror-like qualities allows for a suturing of division and its narratives, bringing together fractured divisions into a whole. The soldiers and the visitors are brought together into a cohesive whole by the reflection, suturing the different temporalities at the memorial marked by the placement of the statues and faces in the wall (which remain still and frozen in time) and the dynamic movement of the visitors (moving through memorial space), reconciling in an architectural sense the experience of soldiers with visitors who are spatially and temporally removed from the experience of war.

Turning to the inscriptions used at the memorials, the overarching rhetoric at this memorial, and perhaps for representations of the Korean War in U.S. memorial culture in general, is embodied by the phrase “Freedom is not free.” Furthermore, there is a panel etched into the ground next to the statues that reads: “Our nation honors her sons and daughters who answered the call to defend a country they never knew and a people they never met.” These two inscriptions draw attention to the

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Landover, Maryland, where the Vietnam War memorial collections are stored, I came across the plaster casts of the other nineteen soldiers in this storage facility and asked him about them. The official book that accompanies the KWVM sheds greater light on the stylistic choice of reducing the soldier statues by half as well: “The original concept called for thirty-eight troopers, symbolizing the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel and the thirty-eight-month duration of the war. But the number proved too large for the allotted space and put the soldiers much too close together to accurately represent troops on patrol. The memorial’s second element, a polished granite wall, helped to solve the numbers problem: The nineteen soldiers would each be reflected in the wall to achieve the symbolic thirty-eight number.” Carol M. Highsmith and Ted Landphair, *Forgotten No More: The Korean War Veterans Memorial Story* (Washington, D.C.: Chelsea Publishing, Inc., 1995): 59.

<sup>48</sup> However, the current Military Demarcation Line is not exactly along the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel. The confusion between the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel division of the Korean peninsula in 1948 and the Military Demarcation Line created after the armistice was signed in 1953 points to the static imagery of the Korean War in U.S. memory.

<sup>49</sup> For more on the DMZ and its significance in memory and representation in South Korean and critical Asian American contexts see Terry K. Park, *De/militarizing Empire: The Korean DMZ* (PhD diss.: University of California, Davis, 2014) and Jeffrey A. Tripp, *Contentious Divide: The Cultural Politics of the Korean Demilitarized Zone, 1953-2008* (PhD diss.: University of Hawaii, Manoa, 2010).

<sup>50</sup> For more elaboration on North Korea as the “ghostly other” for South Korea see Theodore Q. Hughes, *Literature and Film in Cold War South Korea: Freedom’s Frontier* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

sacrifices of veterans who fought for freedom and democracy (Cold War logics that still ring true in this contemporary moment) while also foreclosing any type of emotion besides gratitude. Despite the generic tone of the memorial, these statements are still politically charged. As Kristin Hass explains,

The words *Korea*, *communism*, *containment*, and *Cold War* are not used....More information about the Korean War might have complicated the memorial's statement that "Freedom Is Not Free." The shift to the soldier avoids the vital interests of the past to address the vital interests of the present.<sup>51</sup>

There is nothing in the descriptions that speak to the Korean War as a specific war that took place in a specific geographic locale (what Heonik Kwon describes as locally specific cold war<sup>52</sup>), nor does it delve into what was at stake in the war, even though the individual stakes could be alluded to in the faces of the soldier statues. The phrase "country they never knew and a people they never met" coupled with the temporal boundaries of the Korean War as taking place from June 25, 1950 – July 27, 1953 obscures the U.S.'s involvement in Korean affairs before this date, as well as the continual waves of Korean immigration to the U.S. in the aftermath of the war as well as the existence of a Korean diaspora.<sup>53</sup> These inscriptions take "freedom" at face value, leaving it as the rationale for why war in Korea was necessary as well as justification for the destructiveness of U.S. forces in the peninsula, which was waged on both civilians and land.<sup>54</sup>

The guidebook to the memorial sheds more light on the choice of inscriptions:

Because of the multiple messages already inherent in the design, Cooper•Lecky and the Advisory Board were reluctant to clutter the memorial with allegorical inscriptions. Because of the memorial's prominent location on the National Mall, Kent Cooper had long been concerned that it gave choice to the general theme of military service to country, as well as honoring those who served and fell in Korea.<sup>55</sup>

The origin of the "Our nation honors..." phrase is traced to a statement by then Secretary of Defense Frank Carlucci on the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the Korean War, which was adapted for usage on the memorial. A critical reading of this phrase points to the histories that are erased from this statement: from the U.S.'s "liberation"

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<sup>51</sup> Kristin Ann Hass, *Sacrificing Soldiers on the National Mall* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013): 26-27.

<sup>52</sup> See Heonik Kwon, *The Other Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

<sup>53</sup> See Ji-Yeon Yuh, *Beyond the Shadow of Camptown: Korean Military Brides in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2002) and "Moved by War: Migration, Diaspora, and the Korean War," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 8.3 (October 2005): 277-291.

<sup>54</sup> For more information on the extent of the destruction waged upon Korean land and people see Grace M. Cho, *Haunting the Korean Diaspora: Shame, Secrecy, and the Forgotten War* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008) and Kim Taewoo, "From a hunch to a policy: a structure of bombing civilian areas by USAF fighter-bombers during the Korean War," *Yöksa wa hönsil: Quarterly Review of Korean History* 77 (2010): 417-454.

<sup>55</sup> Carol M. Highsmith and Ted Landphair, *Forgotten No More: The Korean War Veterans Memorial Story* (Washington, D.C.: Chelsea Publishing, Inc., 1995): 69.

of Korea from Japanese colonialism after the end of WWII in 1945<sup>56</sup> to Korean American immigration to the exportation of children through the adoption industry as legacies of the Korean War.<sup>57</sup> Especially since this phrase is accompanied by the dates of the war, June 25<sup>th</sup>, 1950 – July 27<sup>th</sup>, 1953, the reference to a “country they never knew” and a “people they never met” calls forth the glaring exclusion of the recognition of U.S. involvement in creating the conditions for the Korean War before 1950 as well as continuing military presence in South Korea today and structures of “debt imperialism.”<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, critical readings of the memorial contains space for the possibility of return of not only ghosts, but also the very material “returns” of Korean/Asian Americans and the existence of critiques that “might speak back – in English – from its very different positionality,” as Elaine H. Kim argues.<sup>59</sup>

The phrase “Freedom is not free” is more difficult to trace, perhaps because of how generic the phrase is. Levi Fox points out that the original version of the phrase (“eternal vigilance is the price of liberty”) is often attributed to Thomas Jefferson, although no existing records confirm this statement despite its wide circulation.<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, according to Fox,

the phrase “Freedom Is Not Free” is often credited to Colonel Walter Hitchcock of the New Mexico Military Institute, who recalls while “serving on the Secretary of the Air Force’s Staff Group in 1988” that he “was tasked to write his graduation address for that May” and “the phrase came out of” that part of his Secretary’s speech Hitchcock wrote.<sup>61</sup>

However, even the accompanying guidebook to the memorial recognizes that there is no pinpointed reference for the memorial except at the American Legion building in Washington, D.C.: “The powerful saying was borrowed from the memorial’s own Advisory Board, which saw it above the entrance to the American Legion headquarters building in Washington (no one there is completely sure where it originated).”<sup>62</sup> “Freedom is not free” is the mantra corresponding to the “gift of freedom,” and its generic yet loaded registers in the spaces of U.S. memorialization carry new and different meanings when translated to South Korean contexts.

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<sup>56</sup> See Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War, Volume I: Liberation and the Emergence of Separate Regimes, 1945-1947* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981).

<sup>57</sup> See Eleana J. Kim, *Adopted Territory: Transnational Korean Adoptees and the Politics of Belonging* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010) and Soojin Pate, *From Orphan to Adoptee: U.S. Empire and Genealogies of Korean Adoption* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

<sup>58</sup> Jodi Kim, “Settler Modernity, Debt Imperialism, and the Necropolitics of the Promise,” *Social Text* 36.2 (2018): 41-61.

<sup>59</sup> Elaine H. Kim, “Myth, Memory and Desire: Homeland and History in Contemporary Korean American Writing and Visual Art,” in *Holding Their Own: Perspectives on the Multi-Ethnic Literatures of the United States*, edited by Dorothea Fischer-Hornung and Heike Raphael-Hernandez (Tubingen, Germany: Stauffenberg-Verlag, 2000).

<sup>60</sup> Levi Fox, “Not Forgotten: The Korean War in American Public Memory, 1950-2017” (PhD diss.: Temple University, 2018): 354.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Carol M. Highsmith and Ted Landphair, *Forgotten No More: The Korean War Veterans Memorial Story* (Washington, D.C.: Chelsea Publishing, Inc., 1995): 74.



In relation to the gift-debt relationship with freedom as gift in memorial contexts, the guidebook for the KWVM describes the memorial as a veterans memorial rather than a war memorial: “Not a war memorial, a veterans’ memorial, to at long last thank not just those who fell, but all those who went to an unfamiliar land to defend another nation’s freedom, and, therefore, our own.”<sup>63</sup> Here, the logic becomes circular. Allegorical statements within the memorial were minimized, allowing for generic phrases to work better representationally and architecturally, yet these statements eventually became self-evident truths for understanding the experience of U.S. veterans of the Korean War, as illustrated in the quotation above. Similar statements exist at the War Memorial of Korea in Yongsan, Seoul, utilizing the framework of gift-debt as a way to institutionalize forgetting in not just the U.S., but transpacifically to South Korea as well.

### **Transpacific Memorial Discourse: Freedom and Gratitude at the War Memorial of Korea, Seoul, South Korea**

In turning to the South Korean context, the temporality of gift-debt relations functions as a framework for underscoring the memorialization style and tactics found within the War Memorial of Korea, the flagship war memorial and museum in South Korea. This memorial complex, which includes a war museum, memorial and park components, outdoor exhibitions (including an impressive display of various weaponry such as tanks and airplanes), and attached amenities such as a wedding hall, is located in the heart of the capital city of Seoul in the Yongsan district next to the U.S. military base and opened in 1994. The location of the memorial complex is particularly significant as well – on land that was occupied by Japanese military during the colonial era, transferred to U.S. military, restored back to South Korea and utilized as a military base, and after the relocation of the ROK military base to Daejeon, appropriated for its current usage as a war memorial complex/park.<sup>64</sup>

Jodi Kim and Mimi Thi Nguyen write that the temporality of the debt for the “gift of freedom”<sup>65</sup> is perpetually extended into the future in the form of “debt imperialism,” “debt that does not yet have to be repaid. Yet still, it continues to produce debt for various populations who are vulnerable to crushing indebtedness, or what Harvey calls ‘debt incumbency.’”<sup>66</sup> What, then, is the debt accrued for the gift of freedom granted by the U.S. and UN forces in the aftermath of the Korean War? These logics can be found in how freedom and gratitude are discussed at the War Memorial of Korea, particularly in the museum exhibition. Specifically, the transition from South Korea as developing country to developed country and from receiver of freedom to giver of freedom is heavily emphasized in the trajectory of the museum from its presentation of premodern Korean wars to the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and current military and peacekeeping actions throughout the world. Exhibitions focused on the Korean War and the role of the U.S./UN as defenders of freedom, and

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 51.

<sup>64</sup> For more context on the Yongsan Garrison in Seoul, see this interview with Bridget Martin, PhD Candidate at UC Berkeley’s Department of Geography: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Z73-q11eGY&feature=youtu.be>.

<sup>65</sup> Mimi Thi Nguyen, *The Gift of Freedom: War, Debt, and Other Refugee Passages* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012).

<sup>66</sup> Jodi Kim, “Settler Modernity, Debt Imperialism, and the Necropolitics of the Promise,” *Social Text* 36.2 (2018): 54.

South Korea's transition in carrying out the inheritance of this legacy, are found specifically in exhibits that emphasize South Korean peacekeeping missions in Africa and the Middle East and fighting for freedom for other countries like Vietnam.<sup>67</sup>

Moreover, Korean War memoryscapes continue to be shaped and reshaped at the WMK.<sup>68</sup> In a revisit to the War Memorial in the summer of 2016, new additive memorials have been attached to the Peace Plaza.<sup>69</sup> Under each UN participating nation's flag, there are new memorials in the shape of small bowls with black reflective surfaces and white text carved into the surface. The U.S.'s memorial reads "No Longer the Forgotten War," reflecting the change in memorial discourse in the U.S. about the Korean War.<sup>70</sup> What was once a space marking a distinction between the everyday use of the park-like memorial complex and the symbolic/sacred space of memorialization and honoring of national patriotism has shifted with the new additive memorials.<sup>71</sup> The space of memorialization has overtaken or become part of the everyday usage space, pointing to how memory of the Korean War is continuously being shaped and reshaped rhetorically and spatially in South Korea.

Furthermore, "Freedom is not free" acquires another meaning when translated into Korean at the WMK. The phrase appears in both English and Korean at the entrance of the memorial complex engraved on the opening plaque, within museum films that introduce the Korean War, and throughout the UN exhibition hall. Although not explicitly quoted, the "gift of freedom" is alluded to in the exhibitions on the Vietnam War and global military/peacekeeping operations undertaken by the ROK; the framing of these exhibitions focus on the ROK fighting on behalf of freedom for other countries. Specifically, the phrase is translated as "*chayunŭn kŏjŏ chuŏjjinŭn kŏshi anida*," although translated back into English the phrase then becomes "Freedom is not *given* freely." This added layer of exchange and the appearance of a gift-debt relationship add new light to this otherwise innocuous phrase. Who is the

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<sup>67</sup> For more on South Korea's "subimperial" status during the Vietnam War, see Jin-kyung Lee, *Service Economies: Militarism, Sex Work, and Migrant Labor in South Korea* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

<sup>68</sup> For previous work on the War Memorial of Korea see Sheila Miyoshi Jager, "Monumental Histories: Manliness, the Military, and the War Memorial," *Public Culture* 14.2 (2002): 387-410; Hong Kal, *Aesthetic Constructions of Korean Nationalism: Spectacle, politics and history* (New York: Routledge, 2011); Daniel Y. Kim, "Nationalist Technologies of Cultural Memory and the Korean War: Militarism and Neo-Liberalism in *The Price of Freedom* and the War Memorial of Korea," *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review* 4.1 (May 2015): 40-70.

<sup>69</sup> These new memorials were dedicated on November 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2015, and organized by the War Memorial of Korea, donated by Booyoung Co., Ltd., and built by the Visual Arts Institute at Seoul National University. The purpose of the memorials is to commemorate the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of the UN: "In commemoration of the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United Nations, this monument is dedicated to honor the ultimate sacrifices and noble services of soldiers who valiantly fought under the UN flag in the Korean War." The title of the work is "Silence devoted to peace."

<sup>70</sup> Although it can be argued that the Korea War was never truly the "Forgotten War" in the U.S. outside of the national (Washington, D.C.) sphere; local states and counties have constructed memorials, highways, and other memorial markers for their Korean War veterans since the beginning of the war. See Levi Fox, *Not Forgotten: The Korean War in American Public Memory, 1950-2017* (PhD diss.: Temple University, 2018).

<sup>71</sup> Kim Chang-su, "Chŏnjaengginyŏmgwan hyŏnsangsŏlgye mit tangsŏ nane taehan pip'yŏng," *Kŏnch'uk(Taehan'gŏnch'uk'ak'oe ji)* 34.2 (March 1990): 45-46.

giver of freedom? And what is the debt that necessarily entails from this unfree gift of freedom? More significantly, does this translated text need to be amended<sup>72</sup> by the newer ROK memorial at the Peace Plaza that emphasizes military sacrifice with no strings attached? This newer memorial reads: “At the outbreak of the Korean War, young soldiers from 21 countries participated in support of the freedom and peace of Korea with no strings attached. They came to help a country they never knew and a people they never met.” Here, it appears that the phrases are repeated so often in the War Memorial’s exhibition space that they now shift from quotation to factual description in the additive memorial, reflecting a circular logic of memorialization and narrative that sutures together as a form of reconciling history and memory, as in the Korean War Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C.

This erasure of the gift-debt relationship manifests itself in the historical erasures of the temporalities of the Korean War in both U.S. and South Korean contexts, as well as the memorial’s own militarized history. While militarized logics of freedom, gratitude, and sacrifice are overemphasized at the War Memorial, the everyday effects of living within close proximity to U.S. military bases are unacknowledged.

### **Nogunri Peace Park: A Critique of Human Rights Discourse and the Limits of Reconciliation**

The Nogunri Peace Park was built in 2011 and was put into motion by a 2004 law, “Special Act on the Review and Restoration of Honor for the No Gun Ri Victims,” upon recommendation by the South Korean Truth and Reconciliation Commission.<sup>73</sup> This memorial complex is intended to preserve and teach memory of the Nogunri Massacre, which took place from July 26-29, 1950. The massacre was perpetrated by U.S. soldiers, who were unsure if the numerous civilians fleeing from North Korea and front line battlefields were actually civilian refugees, or if they were North Korean soldiers in disguise. The death toll is estimated to be between 250-300 people.

As a peace park, the Nogunri memorial complex attempts to address reconciliation between local and national memories of the Korean War, as counter-memorial to more official Korean War narratives.<sup>74</sup> For example, there is no mention of this massacre in the War Memorial of Korea. The Nogunri Peace Park is an example of the complicated discourses that come out of the desire for reconciliation – the memorial must function as a solution for the government’s acknowledgement of the massacre in the process of transitional justice, but in this case, it also has to struggle with the complicated role of the U.S. as not just liberator of the (South) Korean people or bringer of freedom, but also perpetrator of civilian massacre in the name of that freedom. “Freedom is not free” and questions of sacrifice, debt, and

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<sup>72</sup> Rather than seeing memorial spaces as including design elements that are cohesive with one another or contestations, I use the term “amended” to take into account the changing memoryscapes of the Korean War, a memory that is continuously (re)shaped depending on the political situations in South Korea and the U.S.

<sup>73</sup> The documents can be found here:

[http://nogunri.yd21.go.kr/html/kr/nogunri/nogunri\\_01\\_09.html](http://nogunri.yd21.go.kr/html/kr/nogunri/nogunri_01_09.html).

<sup>74</sup> See Seunghei Clara Hong, “Silenced in Memoriam: Consuming Memory at the Nogunri Peace Park,” *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review* 14 (March 2015): 178-203.

gratitude are further complicated when this messy history becomes coopted by the state in the form of the “peace memorial park.”

While much of the history of the Nogunri Peace Park and its conception centers around one survivor, Chung Eun-yong, who managed to publish his story in 1994<sup>75</sup> (after numerous rejections by publishers and only under the condition that his book was marketed as fiction rather than nonfiction), major news of the massacre hit the U.S. as controversy after a publication by the Associated Press in 1999.<sup>76</sup> The Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Korea found reports and documentation of the massacre in the National Archives in Washington, D.C., as well as corroborations from South Korean survivors and U.S. soldiers who claimed to have been involved. Despite the recommendations of the TRC to push for compensation for the victims and their families by the South Korean and U.S. governments, as well as a formal apology, the U.S. government has not formally apologized nor acknowledged that this particular massacre occurred.<sup>77</sup> After all, in terms of gift-debt relations, what does the U.S. government owe to the South Korean government or civilians when it brought the “gift of freedom”? It is not so much that there are “no strings attached” to the gift of freedom as the additive memorial to the War Memorial writes, but that the “gift of freedom” creates conditions for infinite debt (of gratitude, ongoing military presence, etc.) for Koreans while absolving the U.S. of any responsibility for war crimes and the crime of the Korean War and the division of the Korean peninsula in 1945.<sup>78</sup> This museum shows that there are indeed “strings attached” to the price of freedom.

An example of the exhibition tone in the museum can be found in the presentation of President Bill Clinton’s statement of regret from 2001 in which he says: “On behalf of the United States of America, I deeply regret that Korean civilians lost their lives at No Gun Ri in late July, 1950.” While many survivors view the statement as an insult since it is not an apology or admission of guilt, the museum takes on a more positively ambivalent tone: “The intensive, yearlong investigation into this incident has served as a painful reminder of the tragedies of war and the scars they leave behind on people and on nations.” The scars are not just South Korea’s, but also of the U.S. soldiers who must deal with the painful cost of collateral damage in the fight for freedom and security, almost lending equal weight to the perpetrators of violence as well as the recipients of violence, or freedom. “Freedom is not free,” traveling from Washington, D.C. to Seoul to Nogunri continues to resonate in different ways across the transpacific.

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<sup>75</sup> Chung, Eun-yong, *Then, Do you know our Pain?* [*Kūdae uriūi ap’ūmūl anūnda: nogūlli iyagi*] (Seoul: Dari Media, 2011).

<sup>76</sup> The report was awarded a Pulitzer Prize in 2000. Full reports can be found on the Pulitzer Prize website: <https://www.pulitzer.org/winners/sang-hun-choe-charles-j-hanley-and-martha-mendoza>.

<sup>77</sup> See Henry Em, Christine Hong, and Kim Dong-Choon, “Coda: A Conversation with Kim Dong-Choon,” *positions: east asia cultures critique* 23.4 (Fall 2015): 837-849; Christine Hong, “The Unending Korean War,” *positions: east asia cultures critique* 23.4 (Fall 2015): 596-617; Seunghei Clara Hong, “Silenced in Memoriam: Consuming Memory at the Nogunri Peace Park,” *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review* 14 (March 2015): 178-203.

<sup>78</sup> Jodi Kim, “Settler Modernity, Debt Imperialism, and the Necropolitics of the Promise,” *Social Text* 36.2 (2018): 41-61.

As visitors walk out from the museum at Nogunri and encounter the outdoor memorials, as well as the actual site of the Nogunri Massacre, the site-specificity of the tunnels stands in stark contrast to the ways in which other parts of the peace park “are in danger of reinforcing the dominant ideology and obscuring responsibility for both past atrocities and current social iniquities.”<sup>79</sup> The bullet holes on the walls of the tunnels are circled with white chalk – direct evidence of U.S. attacks on South Korean civilians, supplementing the testimony of survivors. Yet, even the material evidence does not seem to be enough because unclaimed responsibility still exists. Across from the twin tunnels, in the park, there is a children’s play set situated in between a replica of a tank on one side and a fighter jet on the other, calling to mind the outdoor exhibition of the War Memorial of Korea. These contradicting landscapes of memory where multiple discourses and narratives are able to exist simultaneously together seem particularly poignant as the “gift of freedom” can be seen in the juxtaposition of the instruments in carrying out freedom alongside the material remains of its costs.

Differential memoryscapes of the Korean War speak to the inherent difficulties in memorializing a war that is not only ongoing, but also that has not quite addressed the problems of “de-cold war” raised by Chen Kuan-Hsing. The Korean War, while not “forgotten” in the South Korean context, still privileges certain narratives and discourses such as the U.S. as liberator and bringer of freedom, which obscures other narratives such as the experiences and memories of civilians massacred by U.S. soldiers. Yet, in pushing for truth and reconciliation and the enfolding of locally specific memories into national memories, peace parks like the Nogunri Peace Park also must turn to reconciliatory practices such as calling for a universal and generic human rights discourse to coincide with existing Korean War memorial narratives.<sup>80</sup> It is important to reflect also on Jinsoo An’s discussion of the inherent conservatism of Korean War cinema, as his critique speaks to memorialization of the Korean War more broadly:

Nihilistic in character, South Korean antiwar films critique war and its destruction by highlighting humanistic values. Yet these films are not fundamentally different in kind from state-sanctioned, anticommunist war films insofar as both promote a pessimistic view towards politics without calling into question the structure and practice of the state power in the first place.<sup>81</sup>

While the contexts are quite different in that the war and peace museums are not “nihilistic in character” nor necessarily “pessimistic” in their view towards politics as could be argued about Korean War films, An’s point about how both war and antiwar films speak to an inherent conservative ethos can be found in both war

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<sup>79</sup> Seunghei Clara Hong, “Silenced in Memoriam: Consuming Memory at the Nogunri Peace Park,” *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review* 14 (March 2015): 146.

<sup>80</sup> Hiro Saito has referred to this as “cosmopolitan commemoration” in the context of peace memorials in Japan. Hiro Saito, “The A-bomb victims’ pleas for cosmopolitan commemoration: Toward reconciliation and world peace,” *Thesis Eleven* 129.1 (2015): 72-88.

<sup>81</sup> Jinsoo An, “War as Business in South Korea’s Manchurian Action Films,” *positions* 23.4 (2015): 785-806.

memorials/museums and peace memorials/museums. “Calling into question the structure and practice of state power in the first place” is precisely what critical Asian American memorial studies aims to do. By reading various transnational Korean War memorials and museums together with the repetitions of similar discourses of gratitude, freedom, and sacrifice within a framework not necessarily supported by the museums/memorials themselves, but present within the meeting of individual subjectivities with museum/memorial space, it becomes possible to examine Korean War memorializations that attempt to “de-cold war,” and to reimagine alternate frameworks for memorialization, challenging and complicating dialectics of remembering and forgetting.

## Chapter 2

### Korean War Memorialization and Temporality in “Post”-Cold War South Korean Blockbuster Cinema

In a meeting between South Korean Lee Soo-hyök, played by Lee Byung-hun, and North Koreans Private Jöng Wöo-jin (played by Shin Ha-kyun) and Sergeant Oh K'yung-p'il (played by Song Kang-ho) in the film *Joint Security Area* (*Kongtongkyöngpikuyök JSA*, hereafter referred to as *JSA*) (Park Chan-wook, 2000), after Soo-hyök crosses the DMZ over the Bridge of No Return to North Korea, Private Jöng, in his excitement exclaims: “You’ve done a great thing. After half a century of division, you have breached our tragic history of agony and disgrace, broken the dam to reunify our country.” This scene demonstrates the visualization of an imagined situation in which North Koreans and South Koreans meet not as enemies, but as friends. Furthermore, unlike the history of the Korean War in South Korean museums, which paints the picture of continued North Korean attacks against South Korea (from the official beginning of the Korean War in 1950 to the axe murder incident in 1976 to the Yöngpyöng shelling in 2010), in this film it is the South Korean soldier who crosses the border first. This crossing is not an act of war, but rather an act of friendship and a desire by the South Korean soldier to know the North Korean soldiers on an intimate and human scale.

How do South Korean blockbuster films<sup>82</sup> in the mid-to-late 2000s<sup>83</sup> imagine the Korean War? And, how do South Korean filmmakers reimagine the Korean War

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<sup>82</sup> The films analyzed throughout the chapter fall roughly within the genre of the “Korean blockbuster.” Youngmin Choe argues that the Korean blockbuster first emerged on an international scale with the release and success of Kang Je-gyu’s film *Shiri* in 1999. Furthermore, she argues that the success of Korean blockbusters beginning in the late 1990s/early 2000s also simultaneously emerged alongside a “memory boom,” which not only popularized the Korean War as a subject of blockbuster cinema, but also depicted a general loosening of the formally rigid (and heavily censored) depictions of North Koreans, humanizing North Korean characters. See Youngmin Choe, “Postmemory DMZ in South Korean Cinema, 1999-2003,” *Journal of Korean Studies* 18.2 (Fall 2013): 315-336; Jinhee Choi, *The South Korean Film Renaissance: Local Hitmakers, Global Provocateurs* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2010); Frances Gateward, ed., *Seoul Searching: Culture and Identity in Contemporary Korean Cinema* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007); Susie Jie Young Kim, “Korea beyond and within the Armistice: Division and the Multiplicities of Time in Postwar Literature and Cinema,” *Journal of Korean Studies* 18.2 (Fall 2013): 287-313; Daniel Martin, “South Korean Cinema’s Postwar Pain: Gender and National Division in Korean War Films from the 1950s to the 2000s,” *Journal of Korean Studies* 19.1 (Spring 2014): 93-114; Darcy Paquet, *New Korean Cinema: Breaking the Waves* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); Chi-Yun Shin and Julian Stringer, eds., *New Korean Cinema* (New York: New York University Press, 2005).

<sup>83</sup> Along with Korean blockbusters’ humanizing North Korean characters, this time period reflected changing politics towards North Korea in South Korea with Kim Dae-jung’s presidency (1998-2003) and extending into his successor Roh Moo-hyun’s presidency (2003-2008). The Kim Dae-jung administration spearheaded the new “Sunshine Policy” toward North Korea, which built diplomatic relations between South Korea and North Korea and exhibited more tolerance and support towards North Korea, including allowing for reunions of divided families, with the goal of reconciliation and

through scenes of affect between enemy soldiers? In other words, how do films depict instances in which South Koreans and North Koreans, to borrow from the film *JSA*, “breach the tragic history of agony and disgrace, broken the dam to reunify our country?” In order to answer these questions, the chapter analyzes four contemporary South Korean films that (re)present the history of the Korean War through imagining and imaging as alternate history: *2009 Lost Memories* (Lee Si-myung, 2002), *Welcome to Dongmakgol* (Park Kwang-hyun, 2005), *Joint Security Area* (Park Chan-wook, 2000), and *The Front Line* (Jang Hoon, 2011).

While these films focus on different eras of history (Japanese colonial period – 1910-1945 – in *2009 Lost Memories*, the Korean War in *Welcome to Dongmakgol* and *The Front Line*, and the present day in *JSA*), they all present the “problem” of the Korean War in similar ways. With the exception of *The Front Line*, which is a bridge film that connects the early to mid-2000s films to the post-2011s films examined in the next chapter, they rewrite dominant narratives of the Korean War (Cold War logics of anticommunism v. communism) and instead focus on North Korean-South Korean friendship/collaboration as a means by which to reimagine the Korean War. Furthermore, *2009 Lost Memories*, *Welcome to Dongmakgol*, and *JSA* not only rewrite the history of the Korean War, but they also rewrite the “enemy” during the war as well. Each of the three films also presents similar plot situations in which a group of disparate heroes (made up of North and South Koreans) band together to fight for a greater goal, which is the circumvention of division, and movement towards peaceful reconciliation and unification of the two Koreas. This results in changing the very epistemological logic of the Korean War of communism v. anticommunism, moving to a discourse of (unified) Koreans v. foreign invaders or any party invested in maintaining the system of Korean division. In other words, the reimagined enemy of the Korean War is the Korean War itself and those states/entities invested in upholding this unending and protracted war.<sup>84</sup> Thus, analysis of the films points to the radical possibilities of a different Cold War future/history/temporality, and the spaces that allow for such a reimagining.

Next sections of this chapter explore the possibilities of Cold War realignments and reimaginings, and the ways in which each of the three films – *2009 Lost Memories*, *Welcome to Dongmakgol*, and *JSA* – utilize temporality and space to question dominant Cold War logics of anticommunism v. communism. However, as close readings of the films’ endings and usage of the medium of photography in the endings demonstrate, ultimately, while they allow for spaces of alternate histories and reimaginings of Cold War temporality, the films also demonstrate how these spaces and temporalities are doomed to failure and remain in the space of imagination even within the film world. The last section of the chapter focuses on *The Front Line* as a

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reunification. I study the films produced during the Sunshine Policy era for how they mirror the policies at the time as well as their enduring cultural legacies on audiences then and in the present. In examining the theme of reconciliation as a thread running through Korean War cultural memory, these films come closest to portraying this in a literal manner through the focus on North Korean-South Korean intimate friendships.

<sup>84</sup> As analyzed further in this chapter, in *2009 Lost Memories* the main enemies are the Japanese colonizers, in *Welcome to Dongmakgol* they are U.S. soldiers (even though the U.S. was the primary ally of South Korea during the Korean War), and in *JSA* they are the South Korean and North Korean states that are both invested in maintaining the division of the Korean peninsula.



transitional film between the films of the 2000s and the post-2011 films, explored in the next chapter, which all feature endings that make use of the photograph.

### Space of Alternate History, Cold War Temporality, and Korean War as Epistemological Problem for Reconciliation

The Korean War, outside of its historical eventness, is also an epistemological rupture predicated on division and Cold War ideologies that leaves no room for non-alignment or neutrality.<sup>85</sup> Yet these seemingly clear-cut ideologies of “us” v. “them,” of “communist” v. “anticommunist,” of “North Korean” v. “South Korean” do not quite align as comfortably to material bodies as the rhetoric implies. The early-to-late 2000s Korean War films, then, attempt to portray a different way of understanding the Korean War through presenting glimpses of the promise of world(s)/spaces/places that do not exist within the current division system.<sup>86</sup> To this extent, following along scholarship on the Korean War and the Cold War’s “protracted afterlives,”<sup>87</sup> I see these three films as primarily concerned with the recursiveness of the Korean War and an exploration into “division culture,” but with a difference.

<sup>85</sup> I have also encountered the Korean War as an epistemological problem at museum sites throughout the course of my research, addressed in other chapters of the dissertation. The “problem of the Korean War” particularly becomes a literal problem at museum sites in South Korea that focus on the Japanese colonial era. In those museums, the Korean War makes virtually no appearance because the concept of national division shatters these museums’ triumphalist narratives of the collective Korean people’s will to resist colonial domination (oftentimes told alongside a longer genealogy of Korean people’s repelling of foreign attacks, the most famous narrative being the celebration of Admiral Yi Sun-shin and his defeat of the Japanese using his famous “turtle ship” during the Imjin Wars). Kenneth J. Ruoff, in his current research on South Korean museums, refers to this as the “5,000 years of Korean history” narrative, which is found in many museums such as the Independence Hall of Korea.

<sup>86</sup> For more scholarship on the films see Hwang Yŏngmi, “Yŏnghwa e nat’anan han’kuk’chŏn’chaengki mikun gwa min’kan’in ūi kwan’kye” (“The Relationship Between the U.S. Military and a Civilian Population during the Korean War as Depicted in Korean Films”), *Hyŏn’tae yŏnghwayŏn’ku* 18 (2014): 159-185; Kim Han’sang, “Chuhan’mikuk’kongpowŏn (USIS) yŏnghwa ūi ūngsi mek’ŏnichŭm” (“The Mechanism of the Gaze in the USIS Film Propaganda in South Korea,” *Yŏk’samun’cheyŏn’ku* 30 (2013): 167-201; Kim Han’sang, “Naengchŏn’ch’eche wa naesyŏnŏl sinema ūi hon’chongchŏk wŏn’ch’ŏn” (“Cold War and the Hybrid *Ursprung* of South Korean National Cinema”), *Yŏnghwayŏn’ku* 47 (2011): 87-111; Ko Puŏng (Koh Boo Eung), “<Welk’ŏmt’u Tongmakkol> e nat’ananŭn min’chokkongtongch’e” (“The Formation of National Identity in the Film *Welcome to Dongmakgol*”), *比較文學 (Comparative Literature)* 39 (2006): 191-210; Ryu Chaehyŏn, “Han’kukhyŏn Pŭlrok’pŏsŭt’ŏ yŏnghwa ūi Han’kuk min’chok’chuŭichŏk t’ŭk’sŏng: <Kongtongkyŏngpikuyŏk JSA> wa <Han’pan’to>rŭl chungshimŭro” (“The Korean Nationalist Characteristics of the Korean Blockbuster Films: Focusing on *Joint Security Area* and *Hanbando*”), *Han’kuk’ŏnron’chŏngbohak’bo* 59 (2012): 116-137; Sŏ In’suk, “Han’kukhyŏng Pŭlrok’pŏsŭt’ŏ esŏ pun’tan ūi chehyŏn’pangsik: han kwa shinp’a ūi kwihwan” (“The Representation of Korean Political Division in Korean Blockbuster Film: The Return of Han and Sinpa”), *Mun’hak kwa yŏngsang* (2011): 981-1015.

<sup>87</sup> Jodi Kim, *Ends of Empire: Asian American Critique and the Cold War* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

The Korean War is an epistemological problem, such that it is portrayed in the films *2009 Lost Memories*, *Welcome to Dongmakgol*, *JSA*, and *The Front Line* as an “unnatural” occurrence, brought about by outside influences. The films demonstrate the effects and affects of the tragic division of the Korean peninsula and people, and that the only “natural” course in rectifying this division is through reunification. Furthermore, they focus on relationships between South Koreans and North Koreans to portray an assumed desire of Koreans to want to be one people and that without the influence of foreign outsiders, unification of the two Koreas would be the “natural” historical progression. The Korean War as epistemological problem indicates a break in this seemingly natural progression. Yet, the films are not entirely able to escape the “problem” of the Korean War and thus resort to depictions of alternate temporalities and spaces to reimagine the Korean War.

Within the Cold War division system, scenes in the films that showcase the affective spaces of imagined community between North Koreans and South Koreans – for example, working together in a farming village or illicitly sharing snacks in DMZ guard houses – exist in an ambiguous space that is imaged as reality onscreen, yet is simultaneously within fantasy cinematic space outside of Cold War temporality. The Korean War and all of its attendant discourses of communism/anticommunism are reimaged within the films as spaces/places in which these discourses are shown to not exist or desired not to exist. In particular, *2009 Lost Memories*, *Welcome to Dongmakgol*, and *JSA* are powerful films because they focus on the space/place of the local and the intimate in order to reimagine a world beyond division and that takes seriously the promise of peaceful (re)unification, even if that promise has to be broken. By depicting this promise through the theme of alternate reality, these films also allow audiences to visualize future peace reunification with North Korea in reality, thus breaking free – if only in the realm of entertainment – from the chains of the epistemological confines of the Korean War that can only see North Korea as enemy other.

Furthermore, the Korean War and the division of the peninsula have often been referred to metaphorically through the lens of stalled temporality, a standstill or pause in time. Instead, I point to a certain circularity of temporalities within *2009 Lost Memories*, *Welcome to Dongmakgol*, and *JSA*, which commonly manifests in these films’ convention of including photographs of the main protagonists, *before* major conflict, in the ending moments or in the credits. This is not so much a slow temporal “decomposition” as in Heonik Kwon’s formulation of locally specific Cold War histories in *The Other Cold War*,<sup>88</sup> but rather what I call memorial time. The memorial time, represented by the photographs, circles back to an imaginary beginning point, a point in time and space that can never be returned to. These films do not just depict stalled temporalities; rather, they are also memorials to the stalled temporality, the time and space that ultimately cannot come to pass. Specifically, through the techniques of visual documentation and memorialization, the films all visualize alternate histories, which provide brief glimpses of worlds and times freed from Cold War divisions, dismantles those worlds, and finally memorializes this loss. These films end with the ambivalent desire to “go back” to a time and space before Korean War; however, as with the historical and present situation of the Korean War itself, these desires are left un-reconciled and unresolved.

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<sup>88</sup> Heonik Kwon, *The Other Cold War* (New York: New York University Press, 2010).

However, film, as immaterial form, could challenge some of these spaces' contested histories/ideologies and propose a new space that exceeds the boundaries of Cold War epistemologies, logics, and insistences on reconciliatory frameworks in the post-Cold War conjuncture. Alternate history and alternate world-making transcend the epistemological notions of the Korean War within the films, and I reconcile this through also analyzing alongside the films theories on Cold War and Cold War temporalities. In particular, Chen Kuan-Hsing's *Asia as Method: Towards Deimperialization*<sup>89</sup> and Heonik Kwon's *The Other Cold War*<sup>90</sup> and their discussions of the Cold War's protracted endings, as well as the understudied lived experiences of the Cold War, help draw out a theorization of these films as belonging to the memorial legacies of the Korean War,<sup>91</sup> which reflect both the promise and eventual denial of future peaceful reunification through the "locally specific" lives of its characters.

Chen's intervention of "de-cold war," which is analogous to processes of decolonization, articulates the necessity of grappling with the specific legacies of the Cold War on the lived experiences of people who are still affected by its ideologies and divisions. To begin the process of "de-cold war" is to "mark out a space in which unspoken stories and histories may be told, and to recognize and map the historically constituted cultural and political effects of the cold war."<sup>92</sup> South Korean films produced in the contemporary "post"-Cold War era are also grappling with "de-cold war," which primarily manifests in themes relating to North Korean-South Korean interactions.<sup>93</sup> That these films seek to carve out a space for "unspoken stories and histories to be told" can be seen as direct reactions to the Cold War and Korean War structures of power and rhetoric that emphasized the disavowal of North Korean people<sup>94</sup> and familial ties across the DMZ.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Kuan-Hsing Chen, *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

<sup>90</sup> Heonik Kwon, *The Other Cold War* (New York: New York University Press, 2010).

<sup>91</sup> For more on memorial legacies of the Korean War see Youngmin Choe, "Postmemory DMZ in South Korean Cinema, 1999-2003," *Journal of Korean Studies* 18.2 (Fall 2013): 315-336; Suhi Choi, *Embattled Memories: Contested Meanings in Korean War Memorials* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2014); Suk-Young Kim, *DMZ Crossing: Performing Emotional Citizenship Along the Korean Border* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014). Also see *Cross-Currents E-Journal's* March 2015 issue on "(De)Memorializing the Korean War: A Critical Intervention," which features articles by Suzy Kim, Keun-Sik Jung, Daniel Y. Kim, Sunghoon Han, Seunghei Clara Hong, Brendan Wright, and Bruce Cumings.

<sup>92</sup> Kuan-Hsing Chen, *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010): 120.

<sup>93</sup> See in particular Youngmin Choe, "Postmemory DMZ in South Korean Cinema, 1999-2003," *Journal of Korean Studies* 18.2 (Fall 2013): 315-336; Susie Jie Young Kim, "Korea beyond and within the Armistice: Division and the Multiplicities of Time in Postwar Literature and Cinema," *Journal of Korean Studies* 18.2 (Fall 2013): 287-313; Daniel Martin, "South Korean Cinema's Postwar Pain: Gender and National Division in Korean War Films from the 1950s to the 2000s," *Journal of Korean Studies* 19.1 (Spring 2014): 93-114.

<sup>94</sup> See Theodore Hughes, *Literature and Film in Cold War South Korea: Freedom's Frontier* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

<sup>95</sup> See Suk-Young Kim, *DMZ Crossing: Performing Emotional Citizenship Along the Korean Border* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

Kwon also questions the “end” of the Cold War, pointing out that “the historical turning point glossed as the end of the cold war is actually an extended horizon of ‘what is not yet,’ a field of time-space that is open to creative political acting and moral imagining.”<sup>96</sup> The films analyzed literally take on the “locally specific” Cold War – and Korean War – through the exploration of the “what is not yet” by imagining and imaging an alternate history/future that has not yet arrived. Kwon also likens the Cold War’s ends as a slow “decomposition,” a time and space that is not quite divorced of the past yet still cannot fully imagine a future; it is an “unsettling situation in which the living reality is not really free from the immediate past and has not reintegrated the past into the time present as a past history – that is, it has a kind of spectral existence.”<sup>97</sup> The spectral existence of multiple temporalities takes form in the alternate futures, histories, and presents found within the 2000s South Korean films. While these films present alternate histories, they also depict alternate temporalities of the Cold War and the Korean War, as well as an alternate epistemology for the Korean War – rethinking and revisualizing the Korean War and lives not burdened by Cold War binary constraints. At the same time, the alternate temporalities and spaces are shown to ultimately not last and thus are also memorialized through cinematic techniques and memorial time within the films.

The next sections of the chapter examine how the films *2009 Lost Memories*, *Welcome to Dongmakgol*, and *JSA* depict the spaces of alternate histories of Korean War within the diegesis, as well as their ultimate failure in maintaining these spaces and the usage of photography within the film media as a form of memorial time. I end with *The Front Line*, which also ends with a photograph, as a bridge between the 2000s Korean War films and the 2010s Korean War films explored in the following chapter.

### **Alternate Histories, Temporalities, and Spaces of the Korean War in *2009 Lost Memories*, *Welcome to Dongmakgol*, and *JSA***

Each of the three films – *2009 Lost Memories*, *Welcome to Dongmakgol*, and *JSA* – focuses on the theme of alternate history. On the basic level, the historical circumstances presented within the films are different from current historical reality. These films present the promise of an alternate history and future, which could lead to a different understanding of those historical events for the audience, as well as a reevaluation of the legacies of the events of the Korean War. Therefore, the alternate histories traced in these films directly speak to alternate epistemologies of the Korean War.

The films all play around with the rhetorical questions of “what if...?” and follow the logics of this alternate line of questioning through their film narratives. Thus, they portray the speculations, promises, and failures of an alternate history/future that is different from reality and/or does not yet exist. *2009 Lost Memories* asks the question: What if Japanese colonization of the Korean peninsula had never ended? What would be the history/future of the Korean peninsula if Japanese colonization had never ended? *Welcome to Dongmakgol* asks: What if there exists a place totally devoid of conflict and war during the Korean War, as well as completely unaware of Cold War logics and structures of feelings? What would this

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<sup>96</sup> Heonik Kwon, *The Other Cold War* (New York: New York University Press, 2010): 8.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid, 33.

place look like? *JSA* asks: What if there is a different method of approaching North Korean-South Korean relations that could subvert the current division system? And, what would North Korean-South Korean interactions look like in arguably one of the most ideologically demarcated spaces on the Korean peninsula, the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ)? These “what if” questions deal directly with the issues of temporality, place, and space and their relations to history and memory.

Therefore, despite the different periods of history in which each film takes place, they all posit a rethinking of the Korean War and a questioning of dominant Cold War/Korean War allegiances and demarcations, as well as provide glimpses of an alternate temporality and space for a peaceful end to the Korean War and future reconciliation and reunification with North Korea. As the Korean War is still not technically over, these films form part of a continued grappling with memory and memorialization of the Korean War and a working through of “de-Korean War.” Specifically, the alternate history of the Korean War manifests itself through each of the films’ alternate enemies of the Korean War.

*2009 Lost Memories* (Lee Si-myung, 2002) is a science fiction/action film about a Korea in which Japanese colonization had never ended. Here, alternate history is played out literally within the narrative – the film takes place in alternate history Seoul in 2009 and follows the stories of two Japanese Bureau of Investigation (JBI) officers, one ethnically Korean, as they investigate the terrorist group Hureisenjin, who function as modern-day Korean independence fighters. Throughout the film, Jang Dong-gun’s character, Sakamoto, who is otherwise almost completely assimilated into Japanese society, grapples with his Korean roots and eventually joins the Hureisenjin cause.

It is later revealed in the film that the alternate history was not a natural occurrence; rather, in the “correct” timeline of the film, a Japanese scientist had gone back in time to alter Japanese and Korean history. The scientist (in unaltered 2009) time traveled to 1909 Harbin and assassinates An Jung-geun before he can assassinate Ito Hirobumi, the first governor-general of Korea. This then sets in motion a new storyline and history in which the March 1<sup>st</sup> Movement of 1919 is effectively dispersed, the U.S. and Japan end up as allies during WWII, and the atomic bomb is dropped on Berlin in 1945 instead of on Japan.<sup>98</sup> Preventing the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki serves as the impetus for why the Japanese scientist wanted to travel back in time in the first place.

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<sup>98</sup> The beginning of the film lays out the altered history through a visual timeline with faked archival photographs playing in the background. The timeline is as follows (transcribed from the English subtitles): “Failed assassination attempt on Chosun Governor Ito Hirobumi; Assassin Choong-Kun Ahn shot and killed on site; 1910 – Takeover of ‘Chosun’ – the Korean peninsula; Ito Hirobumi appointed as first governor of Chosun; 1919 – March 1, illegal gathering in Pagoda Park dispersed; 1921 – Inoue [the time-traveling scientist] appointed as second governor of Chosun; 1932 – BG Yoon killed in Honxiao Park, Shanghai; 1936 – US and Japanese soldiers fight as allies in World War II; 1943 – Japan takes over Manchuria; 1945 – Atomic bombs dropped on Berlin, World War II ends; 1960 – Japan accepted into UN as a permanent member of the UN Security Council; 1965 – Sakura I satellite goes into orbit; 1988 – Olympic Games held in Nagoya; 2002 – Soccer World Cup held in Japan.” Note the missing Korean War in the revised timeline.

Never mentioned in this film, the Korean War in this alternate timeline never occurs because the Soviet Union and the U.S. had never divided the peninsula after 1945, as Korea had never become an independent nation. Furthermore, even in the corrected timeline, the problem of the Korean War is elided as it is revealed that in “proper” timeline 2009 Seoul, North and South Korea had already been reunified. Thus, this film’s alternate history posits an altered timeline and corrected timeline that are both different from current historical conditions on the Korean peninsula.

Even though the film is not explicitly about the Korean War, and the erasure of the war could be seen as just another result of the failure of Ito Hirobumi’s assassination setting into place a new historical timeline, the film still ends with a restored timeline 2009 Seoul in which the Korean War does happen. Even though it is not explicitly mentioned, the audience can surmise that the Korean War happened because of the film’s ending with the successful reunification between South Korea and North Korea. Thus, the problem of the Korean War is resolved without actually depicting or mentioning the Korean War. Nevertheless, the Korean War is still important because its erasure within the diegetic frames of the film, despite addressing reunification, marks it as significant as if the war had appeared visually onscreen.

Furthermore, the Hureisenjin in the film work together despite their knowledge of the correct timeline – they acquired knowledge of the correct timeline because a Korean scientist had also followed the Japanese scientist back in time and informed future generations of Koreans about the timeline change. While North/South division does not demarcate the terrorist/independence fighters, it is assumed that with the restoration of the timeline, perhaps they might not be on the same side after all because of the impending division of the peninsula that would result from correcting history. This results in another difficult hypothetical question: is a future without the Korean War, which had resulted in the deaths of millions of people (soldiers, civilians, and participants from across the world), even at the expense of continuing Japanese colonization, worth it? The film sidesteps the answering of this difficult question, eliminating the problem of the Korean War completely. As a senior member of the Hureisenjin explains in regards to the “proper” timeline, “[in] 2008, after 60 years of separation North and South Korea united to become a new nation with a strong economy and military. Korea became a new icon in Asia.” The film posits this explanation of successful future reconciliation as the ultimate goal and thus, even if the Korean War were to happen, successful Korean reunification would justify the deaths that resulted from the war.<sup>99</sup> The film necessarily has to end with successful reunification and (unified) Korea becoming the “new icon in Asia” because anything less may lead the viewers to question the dangerous notion of ongoing Japanese colonization as being less destructive than the Korean War, a line of alternate what-if questioning that subverts nationalist discourses, in which Japanese colonization is one of the absolute worst events in Korean history.

In the film, there is also little question of who the enemy is – the Japanese who continue to colonize Korea. Despite the presence of some sympathetic Japanese

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<sup>99</sup> Additionally, the deaths and displacements that resulted from the Korean War/Cold War in Korea such as the civilian massacres in Jeju (the 4.3 Incident), as well as throughout the rest of the Korean peninsula, the sexual and gendered violence of military camptowns, and the “orphans” from the Korean War that were/were not adopted within the transnational and transracial adoption industry.

characters, the film overall condemns the Japanese as they indiscriminately and brutally kill the Hureisenjin, including a young boy, and exhibit racist attitudes toward ethnic Koreans. Furthermore, the “memory wars” that affect contemporary Northeast Asian relations is shown in a literal manner in this film: the Japanese not only distort events in textbooks or conservative museums such as the Yushukan in Yasukuni Shrine, but they also literally change history. Thus, the film is as much about the contemporary “memory wars” as it is about the legacy of independence movements in Korea and the erasure of the Korean War within that narrative. The film, then, through the Hureisenjin’s mission, argues for the rightful and “true” history, although true history in this case also comes along with the added fantasy outcome of future unified Korea becoming a “new icon in Asia.”

However, despite these seemingly clear boundaries between enemy and ally within the film, the idea of enemy may not be as clearly delineated as it appears. For example, the Hureisenjin could be seen as the main enemies in the film because while on a global scale, their mission to fight for Korean independence and future successful reunification is a noble endeavor, on the locally specific scale, the Hureisenjin are fighting for a history in which the Korean War resulted in the deaths of many Koreans and non-Korean combatants as well as the displacement and separation of millions of Korean families, which still affect Koreans and Korean diasporic subjects today.

Thus, the film sets up a choice between Japanese colonization or unified Korean sovereignty (and Korean global economic success) despite the more realistic choice lying between continued Japanese colonization or the death toll/destruction of the Korean War, which resulted in a still-divided Korea and its traumatic legacies. This is an epistemological problem that is too controversial to grapple with in a single film and because the film is unable to reconcile the problem of the Korean War, it ends up effacing it completely. Even with the erasure of the Korean War as a historical event in this alternate history film, the problem of the Korean War continues to haunt the film, demonstrating the inescapability of contemporary Cold War consciousness. This is manifested in the final photographic scene of the film.

In *2009 Lost Memories* the photograph appears in the last scene of the film, which takes place in a successfully restored timeline Seoul in 2009 and follows a group of schoolchildren as they learn about the independence movement from a docent at the Independence Hall of Korea. In this final scene, one of the children runs back to look at a display and within the display he sees a photograph of Sakamoto and his love interest alongside the other independence fighters from the 1930s. The presence of the photograph, rather than providing visual evidence of an authentic past,<sup>100</sup> feels out of place. Sakamoto and his love interest are the only people smiling alongside the serious faces of the independence army and appear as if they were placed into the photograph post-event.

This photograph, which signifies Sakamoto’s success in being able to restore the proper timeline, ends up resembling a tourist photograph taken at a museum.<sup>101</sup> The photograph coopts Sakamoto into a history that is, by association with the Independence Hall of Korea, even in a timeline that resulted in successful

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<sup>100</sup> As discussed in the next chapter, this is in contrast to post-2011 Korean War films, which precisely use photographic or archival documents as historical evidence within the narrative.

<sup>101</sup> It is common for most museums in South Korea to allow visitors to take pictures of themselves with historical filters and figures as background.

reunification, a specifically South Korean history. Yet, when Sakamoto chose to join the Hureisenjin, disavowing his Japanese collaborator identity, he made the choice to represent Korea and not South Korea, as the country had not yet been divided. However, the end of the film seems to erase Sakamoto's choice as the photograph, located within a South Korean museum and within the museum tradition of photographing oneself as a part of history, seems to eerily insert the question of nationality back into the film – a specifically South Korean nationality despite the film's assertion that restored timeline 2009 is the year after North Korea and South Korea peacefully reunified. Thus, despite the film's attempts at envisioning an alternate future in which the Korean War is not a problem, the space in which the film ends is already inherently embroiled in the politics of Cold War and Korean division.

*Welcome to Dongmakgol* (Park Kwang-hyun, 2005) takes place during the Korean War. The film follows a group of North Korean soldiers and South Korean soldiers as they accidentally discover a hidden village called Dongmakgol.<sup>102</sup> The film's portrayal of Dongmakgol in bright vivid colors and with fantastic elements like CG-generated huge boars has drawn comparisons to the magical landscapes of Japanese animator Hayao Miyazaki, founder of Studio Ghibli, and contribute to the fantasy-space of the village.<sup>103</sup> Furthermore, Dongmakgol connects a realm between fantasy and reality because the villagers within Dongmakgol have no idea that there is a war occurring, let alone that the country has been divided. The village ultimately becomes a meeting point not only for the South Koreans and North Koreans, but also a downed U.S. pilot and the rescue group that comes after him under the pretense that Communist soldiers captured him.

The early parts of the film are comedic and straddle the line between utopian fantasy comedy film and realist war film.<sup>104</sup> For example, when encountering each other for the first time in Dongmakgol, the North Koreans and South Koreans take part in a "Mexican standoff" and as both groups threaten to mutually kill each other, they also take the villagers hostage. The framing in the standoff scene demonstrates the visual logics of division with both sets of combatants on opposite sides of the frame and the villagers literally caught in the middle. However, unable and perhaps simply unwilling to understand the situation, villagers soon amble off to their own daily activities. As they gradually leave and reenter the frame to use the toilet, to harvest crops, and to do other daily activities, the villagers demonstrate visual opposition to the structures of division by agentially choosing to completely leave the scene and screen. The humor arises from the situation in which the villagers completely refuse to follow the instructions issued by the opposing military factions, as it is unfathomable to imagine a situation like this in other Korean War films (the villagers would have probably been immediately killed even before having the

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<sup>102</sup> There is no further specified location for the village of Dongmakgol in the film, but the filming site is in Gangwon Province in Pyeongchang Village. For more information see: [http://english.visitkorea.or.kr/enu/SI/SI\\_EN\\_3\\_1\\_1\\_1.jsp?cid=6244-6](http://english.visitkorea.or.kr/enu/SI/SI_EN_3_1_1_1.jsp?cid=6244-6).

<sup>103</sup> Adding to the fantasy element, Joe Hisaishi, famous for working as composer on Studio Ghibli projects, composed the soundtrack to *Welcome to Dongmakgol*.

<sup>104</sup> Despite *Welcome to Dongmakgol*'s falling within the subgenre of comedy film, the ending employs blockbuster spectacle typical of other war films and features melodramatic war film conventions. In fact, the affective qualities of the film, particularly in its last arc, are similar to that of the blockbuster film *Taegukgi: The Brotherhood of War* (*T'aekŭkki hwinalrimyŏ*) (Kang Je-gyu, 2004).



opportunity to question who the invading soldiers are<sup>105</sup>). The standoff scene concludes with a North Korean soldier accidentally sets off a grenade, which results in the destruction of the villagers' food supply shed – a magically absurd scene in which the stored corn turns into popcorn during the explosion.

The film then follows the soldiers as they end up working together in the fields to help replace the villagers' food supply. Changing out of their military uniforms into the white clothes of the villagers, the film demonstrates the soldiers' transformation from wartime enemies to peaceful allies under the aegis of the utopian fantasy of rural agricultural life, a life that had been disrupted by war. However, the village is soon under attack as U.S. soldiers prepare to bomb Dongmakgol after pinpointing it as the location of a Communist hideout. The North and South Korean soldiers band together to divert the airplanes away from the village and end up sacrificing their lives for the sake of the villagers.

The main enemy in this film is thus displaced to the role of the foreign outsider, the U.S., whose soldiers attempt to bomb the village and hence bring the ideology of the Korean War/Cold War into the peaceful pristine place of Dongmakgol. The North and South Korean soldiers, furthermore, disavow<sup>106</sup> their identity and ideological ties as "North Korean" or "South Korean" and instead identify with the villagers, poignantly illustrated by their wearing of the same clothing as the villagers and the bright lighting of the scenes involving rural idyllic life. While they do don their uniforms again at the end of the film to prevent the U.S. attack,<sup>107</sup> they do so as "allied forces," but this time as a "North-South Joint Force." This is spoken as a joke by one of the soldiers before their imminent deaths; however, the film does rewrite the conflict of the Korean War/Cold War into a miniature war between unified Koreans and U.S. forces.

Furthermore, *Welcome to Dongmakgol*, like *2009 Lost Memories*, "forgets" the Korean War – although forgetting in this film is not literal forgetting but the attempt to erase the problem of the Korean War. This is represented in the film's idealization of the rural utopian village of Dongmakgol in which the villagers have neither knowledge nor experience of the war, as well as how the film portrays agricultural life as enough to break down the ideological barriers between otherwise similar peoples.

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<sup>105</sup> The "shoot first, ask questions later" mentality is particularly emphasized in dramatic films to emphasize the tensions between communism and anticommunism, and historically civilian massacres during the Korean War point to this tendency as well. This comes to play in the reveal of the "truth" in the film *JSA* as well.

<sup>106</sup> Interestingly, this disavowal appears earlier in the film, as one of the South Korean soldiers is a deserter who attempts suicide and reacts with suicidal intentions in the film (for example, jumping on top of a grenade before it is ultimately kicked into the food supply shed as well as stepping in the path of a wild boar).

<sup>107</sup> The point at which the U.S. invades the village is when the film transforms from a predominately magical utopian fantasy comedy film (marked by fantastical CG scenes, bright lighting, and whimsical camera pans) to a conventional war film. While it is common for South Korean films to mix and blur generic codes, the change in pace and mood conveys a disorienting affect. For more on South Korean cinema, war films, and genre intermixing see David Scott Diffrient, "'Military Enlightenment' for the Masses: Generic and Cultural Intermixing in South Korea's Golden Age War Films," *Cinema Journal* 45.1 (Fall 2005): 22-49.

The fantasy-space of Dongmakgol is also the fantasy-space of neutrality. In this neutral space of Dongmakgol, which exceeds the boundaries of Cold War epistemology in which there is no room for neutrality, it is the North Korean and South Korean soldiers' Mexican standoff that becomes absurd. The comedic elements in the film specifically raise from the villagers' lack of understanding of the conflict while the soldiers attempt to bring the war into the locally specific place of the village. Dongmakgol holds the promise of a different space, one in which the Korean War and its attendant Cold War logics can be read as absurd precisely because they are viewed from outside of the contexts by which those alignments can be understood. By painting the Mexican standoff – and by extension South Korean-North Korean relations – as absurd in the eyes of the villagers in this alternate world of the Korean War, film audiences may perhaps also view the reality of division culture as absurd as well. The soldiers' new uniforms – that of the white village clothing – further demonstrates their disavowal of both North Korean and South Korean politics for a different revisionist position, that of (re)unified Koreans against imperialist U.S. forces.

The fantasy-space of Dongmakgol does not last, however. Moreover, the film memorializes the loss of this fantasy-space through the mechanic of using photographs – although in this case, the video camera is specifically used. The downed U.S. pilot in Dongmakgol discovers a video camera among the ruins of another plane and uses it to capture the celebration of the villagers along with the soldiers, before the other U.S. soldiers invade the village. The results of this video are shown in the credits as each character/actor smiles and shows off to the camera. The documentary-style images of the characters are an attempt to show visual evidence of the friendship and camaraderie that has developed among the soldiers, visual examples of the disavowal of Korean War/Cold War politics. That the recording scene takes place right before the brutal invasion of the U.S. soldiers, and the results of the footage are shown after the tragic ending of the film, is further demonstration of the film's idealization of village life and collaborative friendship that exist outside of war.

The video camera also serves to function as memorial to the events of the film as if to commemorate the friendship that is ultimately shattered from the invasion of the U.S. forces and the reappearance of Cold War division systems that had been gradually broken down in the earlier segments of the film. That the images captured by the video camera are only shown in the ending credits points to these images functioning as a form of memorial – not to the Korean War itself, but to the friendships and allegiances built outside of Cold War boundaries and Korean War division.

*Joint Security Area* (Park Chan-wook, 2000) takes place in “present-day” Korea (around 2000, when the film was released) and follows the story of South Korean and North Korean soldiers stationed along the DMZ. The film traces an incident in which two North Koreans end up dead inside of a North Korean guardhouse and an injured South Korean soldier (Lee Soo-hyök, played by Lee Byung-hun) escapes back to the South while a firefight breaks out between the two countries. It is later revealed that the South Korean soldiers – there were two at the scene of the crime – had become friends with the North Korean soldiers and due to the boredom of working the night shift of guarding the DMZ, they exchanged letters

and gifts across the border and begin to meet periodically at the North Korean guard station, forging forbidden bonds of friendship.

The friendship begins when South Korean soldier Soo-hyök steps on a landmine after his platoon accidentally crosses into North Korea and is subsequently rescued by two North Korean soldiers – Private Jöng and Sergeant Oh. The friendship ends, however, when an unintentional discovery of the illicit meetings by another North Korean guard results in the shooting incident, which makes up the central mystery of the film. The film follows the investigation of the murders and does not uncover the truth until the end.

Since both surviving soldiers (Soo-hyök and Sergeant Oh) present differing and contradictory depositions,<sup>108</sup> the Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission, under the command of mixed-race Swiss and Korean Sophie (played by Lee Young-ae), is brought in to mediate the conflict as a neutral third-party. Throughout the film, Sophie becomes increasingly obsessed with uncovering the truth of the incident despite her colleague telling her that “here [in Pammunjeom] the peace is preserved by hiding the truth. What they both [South Korea and North Korea] really want is that this investigation proves nothing at all.”

Unlike *2009 Lost Memories* and *Welcome to Dongmakgol*, in *JSA* the enemy is more difficult to discern as the enemy is not only external but also internal. As is evident throughout the film, the external enemies are the South Korean and North Korean states who, for their own interests, prefer for the investigation to “prove nothing at all,” as maintaining the status quo of division is the optimal solution for ensuring peace. As the South Korean commander says to Sophie, “Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission? There are two kinds of people in this world. Commie bastards...and the Commie bastards’ enemies. Neutral has no place here. You have to choose sides.”

This warning comes to pass as the commander eventually reports to the NNSC authorities that Sophie’s father was a North Korean prisoner of war (POW) who ended up repatriating to Argentina after refusing the choice between North Korea or South Korea, eventually moving to Switzerland. Despite Sophie’s father’s refusal to make a decision for either side, by virtue of his being North Korean, Sophie is no longer deemed to be a neutral party who can mediate between the two countries and must resign from her position. Therefore, this film demonstrates the insidiousness of Cold War and Korean War division culture; even the refusal of a choice between two sides can be read and coopted as opposition.

Furthermore, as the film demonstrates, the DMZ itself is easy to cross – multiple times throughout the course of the film, various soldiers cross the DMZ, whether by accident or on purpose. The friendships and easy bonds that develop between the South Korean and the North Korean soldiers resemble this porous border in order to demonstrate that on the individual level, people do not want to be divided. This radical reimagining of South Korean-North Korean friendship, itself a form of

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<sup>108</sup> Each deposition corresponds to each country’s official position about the incident. For the South Korean perspective, Soo-hyök had been ambushed by North Koreans and barely managed to escape back to the South. The North Korean perspective instead shows Soo-hyök pretending to defect to the North and then attacking and killing the border guards in cold blood. The depositions are visually similar to the flashbacks in Akira Kurosawa’s 1950 film *Rashomon*. In fact, the central incident is shown a total of four times in the film: 1.) the South Korean perspective; 2.) the North Korean perspective; 3.) Soo-hyök’s perspective; and 4.) Sophie’s final investigation results.

alternate history and alternate world-making, paints a scene that solidifies a different image of North Korea to the audience. In this light, Private Jung's words to Soo-hyök are a promise of the potential of an alternate world that provides a different understanding of Korean War division culture knowledge formations: "After half a century of division, you have breached our tragic history of agony and disgrace, broken the dam to reunify our country." When Soo-hyök repeats these words to Private Nam (the other South Korean soldier), Private Nam has noticeable difficulty in "breaching" the division between the countries – as if his body inherently obeys the ideology of division. In fact, it is these bodily responses that reappear later in the film to destroy the friendships. While border crossing through the space of the DMZ remains fluid, ideologies inscribed onto the body still prove too strong to "break down the dam." Hence, the internal enemies within the film manifest in the bodies of the South Korean soldiers, emphasizing the close connection between ideology and militarization, and the ways in which Korean War division is embedded onto the body of the soldier.<sup>109</sup> The internal enemy is the self.

For example, while the film exhibits several points of tension, the friendship that had been cultivated throughout the film is easily shattered through tragic violence when danger becomes imminent – in the moment when the soldiers are discovered by a different, and unfriendly, North Korean guard. Nevertheless, the film points out that despite Cold War discourses and structures that would keep South Koreans and North Koreans apart, the soldiers are able to gain each other's trusts and to develop a friendly brotherly bond with one another. Yet, also, at the moment in which tension breaks out, the kinesthetic response of the South Korean soldiers, ingrained into them through the militarization of South Korean society, overtakes these affective allegiances. Throughout the film, the soldiers are seen shooting at cardboard cutouts of North Koreans. Thus, the immediate reaction in an emergency situation is to shoot, which overtakes the affective allegiances built up among the characters. Therefore, while the film shows us the promise of an alternate world through everyday interactions with North Koreans, it also shatters the promise by showing that ingrained militarized bodily reactions to North Koreans work just as powerfully to destroy that friendship. Unlike *Welcome to Dongmakgol*, in which the soldiers bond together in the space of the village, friendship in *JSA* is shown at its cruel limits – when the body upholds Korean War divisions on its own.

Furthermore, by the end of the film, both South Korean soldiers attempt suicide and Soo-hyök succeeds at the end of the film. When Sophie finds out the truth that Soo-hyök was the first to shoot their friend and reveals this to him, he ends up committing suicide. Soo-hyök had previously thought that the kill-shot was fired by Private Nam, which motivated Private Nam's unsuccessful suicide attempt, as well as the "false" flashback that is shown in the film. The guilt that Soo-hyök and Private Nam bear show that despite the best intentions of friendship as alternate history/world-making, the ideological boundaries of Cold War alignments and their bodily inscriptions prove to be more powerful than even the physical border of the DMZ itself. In fact, Soo-hyök's and Private Nam's suicides are perhaps the only way to be truly neutral – neutrality taken to its extreme is suicide, in which the self ceases to exist.

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<sup>109</sup> Elaine H. Kim and Hannah Michell, "Other as brother or lover: North Koreans in South Korean visual media" in *South Korean Popular Culture and North Korea: Media, Culture and Social Change in Asia*, Youna Kim, ed. (London: Routledge, 2019): 135-148.

Cold War epistemologies are also taken up within the film techniques as well, visualizing an alternate world through unconventional camera pans and ending with a photograph. Perhaps the most unique film technique utilized in *Joint Security Area* and what sets it apart from the other two films discussed is usage of the 360-degrees camera pan. Specifically, two scenes in the film make use of this unique film technique in which all four soldiers – Soo-hyök, Private Nam, Sergeant Oh, and Private Jöng – drink and talk with one another. In these scenes the camera pans to each character as they speak, eventually resulting in a 360-degree circle. These surreal moments inside the basement of the North Korean outpost, in which the camera rotates 360 degrees to each soldier as they talk to each other around a circle, reflect the promise of an alternate future in which friendship can be seen as a different model to existing Cold War alignments.

These scenes are particularly significant not only for their unique visuals, but also for how these visuals destabilize cinematic identification and spectatorship. Taking the classic Hollywood model for example, camera edits should always follow the 180-degree rule, which results in logical cause-and-effect movements of the main characters as well as establishing logical spatial relations within the frame.<sup>110</sup> This allows the spectators to maintain identification with a few central characters. However, the 360-degrees pan breaks this “rule” of filmmaking, which is usually followed in South Korean blockbuster films, destabilizing the spectators’ identificatory gaze to include all the characters. More than any other film, *JSA* allows for identification with North Korean characters beyond narrative and sympathetic character traits through the 360-degrees pan. By incorporating unique camera techniques, the film marries the theme of alternate spaces of Cold War epistemologies with alternate modes of visibility that allows not only for imagining what that space might look like, but also actually displaying it for the viewers.

Another method of imagining alternate spaces and temporalities of the Korean War is found within the film’s usage of the photograph. There are two photographic scenes in the film. The first is when the soldiers decide to take a commemorative photograph of themselves in the guardhouse (like *Welcome to Dongmakgol*, this takes place right before the moment of crisis in which their illicit interactions are discovered). Since they are located within the North Korean guardhouse, the portraits of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il are within the frame of the photograph. The South Korean soldier who is taking the photograph, Private Nam, awkwardly attempts to maneuver his position in order to avoid capturing the North Korean leaders, but is unable to do so. He finally asks the soldiers to put their heads together, which succeeds in blocking the portraits. Here, friendship at the expense of ideology is shown literally through the clever manipulation of the photograph.

Another photographic scene in *JSA* takes place when at the beginning of the film, a tourist on a DMZ tour attempts to take photographs of the soldiers stationed in Pammunjeom despite the rules against photography in this heavily militarized zone. This photograph is later revealed at the end of the film, before the credits, and depicts all four soldiers who would eventually become friends within the frame of the

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<sup>110</sup> Classical Hollywood cinema strives to main continuity (“continuity editing”) and film studies scholars have also used “suture” to describe the logics of this type of cinematography. See David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960* (London: Routledge, 1985) and Kaja Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).

photograph. At the time when the photograph was taken, however, they did not know each other yet. The film and its last scene that focuses on the photograph suggest at the possibility of potential friendship, without the reality of an unsustainable friendship, which resulted in multiple murders and suicides throughout the plot of the film. Hence, there exists in the film memorialization of an impossible time, a time before the Korean War. A time before friendship, that hints only at the potential of future intimacy, is the last image the viewers are left with as the credits begin to roll.

If *Welcome to Dongmakgol* presents the fantasy of an alternate revisionist Korean War in which Koreans work together to expel U.S. imperialist forces (similar to the Hureisenjin against the Japanese), *JSA* depicts the possibility of the political power of friendship in order to change the course of history, and then shatters that possibility. The concept of neutrality is ultimately shown to be unsustainable in the face of stronger cold war structures in place, perhaps only able to exist in fantasy.

Remembering Private Jōng's words that Soo-hyōk had "done a great thing" by "breaching the tragic history of agony and disgrace, broken the dam to reunify our country," these films that portray an alternate history/future of the Korean War and its discourses beyond the framework of communism/anticommunism have also "done a great thing." Jōng's words reflect a self-congratulatory ode to films of this time period, which have just begun to "breach the tragic history." Yet, these films, while imagining and imaging the Korean War through alternate worlds, seem aware that reunification and its promise are fleeting and may not last. They not only self-memorialize moments of alternate histories and futures in the diegesis through the technological apparatus of the photograph, but they also continue to stand as living legacies and memorials for the Sunshine Policy era in which the Korean War and reunification were not just of an imaginary alternate future, but also one that existed right on the cusp of reality.

### **Photography as Ending: Bridging Two Decades of Korean War Cinema through *The Front Line* (Jang Hoon, 2011)**

*The Front Line* (Jang Hoon, 2011) follows South and North Korean soldiers as they fight on the front lines of Aerok Hill ("Korea" spelled backwards). The film is well-noted for its cinematography, particularly in the battle scenes, which show in time-lapse the interchanging of Aerok Hill between the North Koreans and the South Koreans. In particular, *The Front Line* contains elements and themes similar to the 2000s Korean War films, especially *JSA*, but ends with a photograph that is utilized in a different way than films from this period. Rather than functioning as a memorial to lost spaces and times that exist in the space of fantasy, the photographs in *The Front Line* emphasize individual soldiers and forecloses the possibility of any reconciliation between North Koreans and South Koreans, which are reminiscent of the 2010s Korean War films examined in the next chapter. Thus, *The Front Line* is a bridge film that contains themes from 2000s films while anticipating the trend of photographs ending war films in the 2010s.

While there are many sub-plots within the film, *The Front Line* takes place in the final stages of the Korean War, before the armistice is signed. There is an investigation, similar to *JSA*, as a soldier is called upon to join and investigate Alligator Company and the mysterious death of a South Korean platoon leader, as higher authorities suspect a double agent in the midst of the group. The investigator,

Kang Eun-Pyo, eventually discovers that the South and North Korean soldiers have been exchanging letters, alcohol, and other gifts in a box buried at one of the checkpoints. Because the hill has changed hands so many times, the checkpoint has become a convenient place for the soldiers to exchange gifts and letters, revisiting the South Korean-North Korean friendship explored in *JSA* – parallels between *JSA* and *The Front Line* can be seen in the framing of the shots, where a group of soldiers sit and consume gifts together. Eventually, the war is declared over but the armistice does not come into effect for 12 more hours, which leads to the tragic final battle. All of the soldiers on both sides, except Kang Eun-Pyo, are killed.

Along similar lines as the other films, the ending credits of *The Front Line* feature the various cast members – still in character – in video and photographic stills after their onscreen deaths. The photographs are in black-and-white and portrayed as archival documents, marking the shift in photographic endings in Korean War cinema from the 2000s to the 2010s. Unlike *Welcome to Dongmakgol* or *JSA*, these photographs do not reflect the friendship of the soldiers, but instead focus on the tragedy of the loss of lives, particularly because of the futility of the armistice that is not-yet-in-effect. Unlike the other films that hold on to the promise of reconciliation or return to the innocent past, *The Front Line* does not present that hope – rather, the hope that this film presents is for just a few more miles of territory in a country that will inevitably be divided regardless. The ending credits that focus on the individualistic cast members, outside of their relation to each other, is a marked departure from *JSA* and reflects the contemporary historical moment in which reconciliation between North Korea and South Korea is indefinitely deferred.

2009 *Lost Memories*, *Welcome to Dongmakgol*, and *JSA* all conclude with the photograph in order to capture the promise of an alternate history and epistemology of the Korean War outside of Cold War ideological divisions. *The Front Line*'s ending photographs, on the other hand, focuses on individual soldiers but does give equal space to the South Korean and North Korean characters. These photographs are evidence that such a past or future in which North Koreans and South Koreans come together as something other than enemies could exist, even if only momentarily. They allow the viewers to catch glimpses of a world that is unfamiliar yet suggest at the potential for a different praxis beyond Cold War Manichean boundaries of “us” vs. “them.” These films suggest that “us” could be “them” and that individual affective interactions on the locally specific scale could slowly deconstruct or “de-Cold War” these discourses – such as casual crossings of the DMZ that is imagined to be a closed border. These films show that perhaps these borders are not so impenetrable after all. However, while extending this possibility, the films also eventually demonstrate the insidiousness of division culture and thus, the unsustainability of these friendships. Thus, the films' ending photographs also function as memorials to this space and time that was never meant to exist, that cannot exist within Korean War. The Korean War is a “problem” always haunting the cinema that seeks to create alternate fantasy cinematic spaces without Korean War. Until the reality of reunification, viewers of South Korean war cinema in the 2000s can settle with its promise and with the still frame of the photograph as memorial and material evidence of this (im)possibility.

The next chapter explores the new Korean War films that mark a “conservative turn” in South Korean cinema, but which also end with photographs. Specifically, the films are *Ode to My Father* (Yoon Je-kyoon, 2014), *Northern Limit Line* (Kim Hak-soon, 2015), and *Operation Chromite* (John H. Lee, 2016). I discuss the theme of not only memorialization within South Korean cinema, but also the

museum-like qualities found within 2010s South Korean cinema about the Korean War. In doing so, the relation between historical cinema as knowledge production of the Korean War and memorialization of the Korean War is called into question as a form of reconciling history and memory.



### Chapter 3

#### Post-2010s Korean War Cinema: Responsibility, Misrepresentation, and Archival Memory

Why does contemporary South Korean cinema about the Korean War end with the photograph, archival documentation, or memorialization of the main characters? Why is it necessary for these films to function as memorial texts, specifically using the photographic and archival index as a functional form of memorialization within the narrative? This chapter examines the photographic ends of the films *Ode to My Father* (Yoon Je-kyoon, 2014), *Northern Limit Line* (Kim Hak-soon, 2015), and *Operation Chromite* (John H. Lee, 2016). Unlike the 2000s South Korean films that memorialize a time/space outside of Cold War boundaries, the 2010s films continue to reify Korean War/Cold War borders and boundaries, emphasizing the skill, professionalism, and stoicism of South Korean soldiers and civilians, as well as utilizing the photographic ending as historical archival document that provide authoritative truth-images to the events that have unfolded within the narrative. In fact, 2010s Korean War films utilize the photograph and extra-diegetic information as museums do.

The photographs that appear at the final scenes are separated from the diegesis and are what Youngmin Choe refers to as “moments extracted from the continuity of historical time.”<sup>111</sup> I refer to these post-2010 Korean War films as enacting a “conservative turn,” not necessarily due to their political stances and statements, but in their more conservative usage of the freeze frame, in which the photograph often has no connection to the main storyline and serves as memorial markers without any meaning, the “monuments without memory”:

It is possible to read the disposability, the perishability, of transient monuments as an absence of will to endure as well as lack of will to push for its durability. But one can also connect the transience of these filmic and historical objects to a vision of history that is more attached to the moment, that is, one in which filmic time supplements historical time, and one that is quickly discarded after it passes. Historical lived experience becomes just another ordinary commodity.<sup>112</sup>

This seems to be emblematic of not just physical monuments and memorial structures, but also of cinema in the contemporary moment in which memory seems to be itself remembered differently. This chapter examines the 2010s Korean War cinema and the increasing usage of photographic memory and archival documents/visual footage as “monuments without memory,” marking a conservative turn to history and memory in comparison to the films discussed in the previous chapter.

I first discuss *Ode to My Father* (Yoon Je-kyoon, 2014) and its wide sweep of historical time and its portrayal of contemporary Korean history as the first Korean

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<sup>111</sup> Outside of the cinematic realm, debate over whether representation of the Korean War in monumental form should be a “moment” or a “continuum” at the Korean War Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. appears in the archival documents in the Commission of Fine Arts.

<sup>112</sup> Youngmin Choe, *Tourist Distractions: Traveling and Feeling in Transnational Hallyu Cinema* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016): 185.

War film of the 2010s to turn towards this more “conservative” filmmaking technique in referring to Korean War history. Then, I analyze the usage of the freeze frame and other historical and extra-diegetic elements in *Northern Limit Line* and *Operation Chromite* to underscore how Korean War films increasingly turns towards museal elements to (re)present and reconcile memory of the Korean War.

### ***Ode to My Father* (Yoon Je-kyoon, 2014) and Conservative Turn of Korean War Cinema in South Korea**

*Ode to My Father* (Yoon Je-kyoon, 2014) centers, in a Forrest Gump-like way, a somewhat ordinary yet exemplary “everyman” present at important historical events within the nation’s history. While the film does not end with a photograph, it is representative of the new historical outlook of Korean cinema with regards to the Korean War and its place in the wider scope of South Korean history.

The protagonist, Töksu, experiences several key moments of South Korean history; in fact, his story is similar to the narrative told at the National Museum of Korean Contemporary History.<sup>113</sup> He is a child during the Hungnam Evacuation in 1950, where he is separated from his father and sister. He lives in Busan as a refugee with his remaining family and aunt, who owns a store. Later, he travels to West Germany as a miner and meets a nurse, whom he eventually marries. He fights in the Vietnam War, where his rescue of Vietnamese refugees is almost a shot-by-shot mirror of his experience as a refugee from North Korea during the Hungnam Evacuation. In this sense, the narrative also follows South Korean war and history museum narratives in which South Koreans repay the debt owed to the U.S. and UN, taking their place as “saviors” and “liberators” of other countries.

Near the end of the film, Töksu is reunited with his younger sister, who was adopted to the U.S., through the TV program “Looking for Separated Family Members”<sup>114</sup> in the 1980s.<sup>115</sup> As an old man in the present day, he lets go of his wish to reunite with his father and sells his store, which he bought from his aunt and uncle and refused to sell because it was supposed to be the meeting point for the family after they were separated during the Korean War, to developers who will presumably gentrify the historic “international market”<sup>116</sup> area of Busan.

Töksu seems to blindly – and necessarily, given the time period – subscribe to South Korean governmental policy to achieve upward mobility. This plays out even in the scenes of reunification with long-lost family members, and one of the most notable and emotional scenes of the film also conveniently re-enfolds the Korean adoptee into the modern South Korean nation-state.<sup>117</sup> This forward-moving

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<sup>113</sup> *Taehanmin’gukyöksabangmulgwan*.

<sup>114</sup> “*Isan’gajokül ch’atsümnida*.”

<sup>115</sup> For a film that focuses on the reunions of separated families through the TV programs, see *Gilsoddeum* (Im Kwon-taek, 1986). For more on separated families, see Nan Kim, *Memory, Reconciliation, and Reunions in South Korea* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2017).

<sup>116</sup> The title of the film in Korean, *Kukje Shijang*.

<sup>117</sup> For critiques on this discourse from adoption studies scholars see Eleana J. Kim, *Adopted Territory: Transnational Korean Adoptees and the Politics of Belonging* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); Eleana Kim, “Human Capital: Transnational Korean Adoptees and the Neoliberal Logic of Return,” *Journal of Korean Studies* 17.2 (Fall 2012): 299-327; Eleana Kim, “Our Adoptee, Our Alien: Transnational Adoptees as Specters of

temporality of the film, which ends with Töksu “moving on” from trauma, serves also as allegory for the South Korean nation itself. Furthermore, “moving on” in *Ode to My Father* entails giving in to gentrification and urban displacement as well as the logics of South Korean state developmentalism. The Korean War, like the narrative in South Korean museums like the War Memorial of Korea, is something to be overcome and that has been overcome due to South Korean developmentalism and participation in foreign wars – such as the Vietnam War. Thus, the “ode to the father” in the English title refers not just to Töksu, the quintessential father figure, but also perhaps to Park Chung-hee, the shadow father of the modern South Korean developmentalist state.<sup>118</sup>

This theme of reunification and reconciliation with a father figure is particularly played up for melodramatic effect in *Ode to My Father* in one of the last scenes of the film in which an elderly Töksu sits alone in his room crying and lamenting to his missing/dead father about the difficulty of his life while the rest of his family sits in the next room laughing. The camera pans to the mirror in the room, which then reveals an imaginary scene in which child Töksu encounters his father, who tells him, “I know how hard it was for you. And I’ll always be thankful. You did all the things that I couldn’t do.” The camera then zooms out of the mirror back to Töksu crying in the room hugging his father’s clothing, and zooms further out of the window of the house to showcase the disjunctions between Töksu and the rest of his family. Since much of the film tends toward realism, the camera’s entry in and out of the mirror is particularly jarring, and the camera’s whimsical panning and zooming out of the house itself as if to sympathize with Töksu is particularly striking. The camera then pans almost 180 degrees to the cityscape, looking outwards, as if it had developed an agency of its own, and taking on the personal of the “father.”

The scene then fades out to the same scene that the film begins with in which elderly Töksu and his wife, Yöngja, sit on their rooftop, reprising their conversation. Töksu finally agrees to sell his shop by saying, “Surely by now, he’s [his father] too old to come.” The film then ends, fading out after the camera rises above, looking over the scenery and Busan. While there was a notable scene of family reunification – an emotional reunion on TV with Töksu’s long-lost sister Maksun who ended up as an adoptee to the U.S. – earlier in the film, the reunification with the father is never fulfilled except through the fantastic imaginary realm within the mirror in Töksu’s room. Töksu’s decision to close his shop signals that he is finally able to move on from the past, and although the film ending is ambivalently optimistic, the reality of family separation in the aftermath of the Korean War still points to a reconciliatory framework that, even with the reunion of the sister, hints at the personal tragedy of the Korean War. Overall, unlike films of the 2000s, however, the ending of this film is

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Foreignness and Family in South Korea,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 80.2 (Spring 2007): 497-531; Eleana Kim, “Wedding Citizenship and Culture: Korean Adoptees and the Global Family of Korea,” *Social Text*, 74 21.1 (Spring 2003): 57-81; Kimberly D. McKee, *Disrupting Kinship: Transnational Politics of Korean Adoption in the United States* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2019); Kimberly D. McKee, “Monetary Flows and the Movements of Children: The Transnational Adoption Industrial Complex,” *Journal of Korean Studies* 21.1 (2016): 137-178; Soojin Pate, *From Orphan to Adoptee: U.S. Empire and Genealogies of Korean Adoption* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

<sup>118</sup> Seungsook Moon, *Militarized Modernity and Gendered Citizenship in South Korea* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

more positive, much like South Korean economic development during the Park Chung-hee era in the aftermath of the Korean War.

Moreover, this new conservative turn in South Korean cinema can be seen in the representation of the father in *Ode to My Father*, marking a shift since the “Korean New Wave” and the rise of the Korean blockbuster and *hallyu* stardom that Korean film studies scholar Kyung Hyun Kim theorizes:

If the cinema in the 1970s vied to inscribe an unimpaired masculine icon, one that forged a “dominant fiction” out of collective historical memory, the cinema that was touted in the Western film festival circuits during the late 1980s and the 1990s as the New Korean Cinema attained its status, I argue, by demythologizing the name of the national father for the sake of issuing a new modern masculinity....The New Korean cinema’s contestation was waged not only against the official historiography of South Korea that consistently invoked nationalist agencies but also against the new *minjung* (people’s) history that claimed to be the “collective will of the people” while countering the government’s version.<sup>119</sup>

Characters like Yong-ho, the protagonist from the film *Peppermint Candy* (Lee Chang-dong, 1999) that similarly follows a wide sweep of South Korean history as *Ode to My Father*, or the disaffected working class laborer and youth in *Chilsu and Mansu* (Park Kwang-su, 1988) were emblematic of this “new” masculinity and portrayal of modernity that centered male perspectives and the failure of men to live up to the standards of capitalist modernity and state violence required of proper national subjectivity and citizenship. For example, Kim writes of *Peppermint Candy*:

Turning back the clock is only possible in the fantastic realm of the movies, where *Peppermint Candy* ends with the young Yong-ho holding a flower in his hand and wondering about the origin of his “deja-vu” at the river by the railroad track, the very spot where he will die twenty years later. But the Korean cinema’s misogynistic hope of recovering a wholesome maleness and purity from a fantasy, as if it can be transposed to be absolutely real, is, in the final analysis, impossible.<sup>120</sup>

In 2014, however, it seems like this hope is possible through Töksu, a successor to Yong-ho’s traumatic movement through South Korea’s modern history. *Ode to My Father*, as a film that portrays a similar sweeping of time through the life of a male protagonist, seems to reflect the new trend of Korean cinema that portrays the “wholesome maleness and purity from a fantasy” that previously seemed impossible. Following along with this trend, Korean War films in this contemporary period also portray similar male characters as Deok-soo. The next sections examine specifically how the photograph and freeze frame make similar appearances in these films, continuing with the trope of Korean War temporality intersecting with the temporality of memorialization.

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<sup>119</sup> Kyung Hyun Kim, *The Remasculinization of Korean Cinema* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004): 19-20.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

*Ode to My Father*, while taking on a wide sweep of South Korean history, reflects the more contemporary trend in films about the Korean War in portraying South Korea in a more straightforward positive fashion. The end of *Ode to My Father* seems to imply that Töksu's finally being able to move on and not waiting for his father is healthy and allows him to move in a future-oriented, upward trajectory much like the South Korean nation itself as traced throughout the film. While his generation may have suffered from family division, his successful reunion with his younger sister and the coming together of his immediate and extended families seems to imply that the future is indeed different for generations who have not lived through the Korean War. Similar to the fantastic camera movements in and out of the mirror, and out of the apartment, the ghosts of the past seem to depart from the film, freeing Töksu to move on past the traumas of the Korean War.

*Ode to My Father* seems to present the desire to return to the past and to memorialize loss as holding Töksu back and thus, ends on the optimistic tone of Töksu agreeing to let go of his store (and hopes of reunited with his father), allowing for the gentrification and development of the historic Kukje Market. As in museums like the Contemporary History Museum of Korea, the rapid pace of modernization and developmentalism celebrated in the film serves as a metric for how far South Korea has come since the time of the Korean War, and does not allow for a dwelling upon the past that is already gone. Memory itself is increasingly pushed behind and instead what come to the forefront are archival technologies and photographic memorializations within the films that strive to function as an authoritative gaze directing audiences how to think about the war. In other words, these recent films become more like museums, serving as both entertainment and pedagogical tool. The next section of the chapter examines two films – *Northern Limit Line* and *Operation Chromite* – that, like the films discussed in the previous chapter, end with the film memorialization technique of ending with photographs.

### **Archival Memory and Historical (Mis)Representation in *Northern Limit Line* (Kim Hak-soon, 2015) and *Operation Chromite* (John H. Lee, 2016)**

“I sometimes dream that those who died come back, and we fight the battle again.”

- Former 357 PO2 Kim Seung-hwan (Chŏn 357 Kapp'anbyŏng Kim Sŭnghwan)

*Northern Limit Line* (Kim Hak-soon, 2015) and *Operation Chromite* (John H. Lee, 2016) are two of the most recent South Korean film blockbusters to come out in the last few years, and continue a “conservative turn” in Korean War films that was apparent in *Ode to My Father* (Yoon Je-kyoon, 2014). While *Northern Limit Line* is a “post”-Korean War film that focuses on the Second Battle of Yeonpyeong in 2002 during the World Cup,<sup>121</sup> much like *JSA*, the film addresses the unfinished Korean War conflict through battles along the disrupted maritime border between North Korea and South Korea known as the Northern Limit Line.<sup>122</sup> *Operation Chromite*

<sup>121</sup> For the significance of the 2002 World Cup see Rachael Miyung Joo, *Transnational Sport: Gender, Media, and Global Korea* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012).

<sup>122</sup> Both films also overlap with several cycles in contemporary South Korean cinema: while on the surface, it would appear that both films would fit within the naval battle or naval thriller film trend, *Northern Limit Line* fits more comfortably in this genre. Popular South Korean films in this cycle include *The Admiral: Roaring Currents* (Kim Han-min, 2014), *The Pirates* (Lee Seok-hoon, 2014), and *Sea Fog* (Shim Sung-bo, 2014).

takes its title from the military operation run by General Douglas MacArthur on September 1950, which staged a successful amphibious landing in Incheon Harbor, successfully cutting off North Korean supply lines and turning the tides of the Korean War in favor of the ROK, U.S., and UN forces after being driven southwards to the Busan Perimeter. The film focuses less on General MacArthur and the actual landing operation, reserving the landing only for the finale of the film; instead, most of the film focuses on the South Korean intelligence unit responsible for going undercover in North Korea-occupied Incheon and acquiring and communicating necessary information and maps of the Incheon Harbor so that the operation can be enacted successfully.<sup>123</sup>

Like the films explored in the previous chapter, *Northern Limit Line* and *Operation Chromite* end with a freeze frame of a photograph, but tend to insert other archival imagery or photographs throughout the film as well, in a similar way in which historical events and famous people are placed into the film *Ode to My Father*. Unlike *JSA*, *2002 Lost Memories*, and *Welcome to Dongmakgol*, which take place in more fantastic or imagined settings, *Northern Limit Line* and *Operation Chromite* focuses more on realism and utilizing specific archival images within the film text to assert authenticity on history and memory of the Korean War. In this sense, *The Front Line* (Jang Hoon, 2011), which also ends with photographic images of its main cast, reflects a transition period connecting these sets of films. In *The Front Line*, the film ends with a photographic images of its main cast in grainy quality black-and-white; however, unlike *JSA*, *2002 Lost Memories*, and *Welcome to Dongmakgol*, there is no specific scene within the diegesis of the films showing when these photographs were taken. Yet, like those films, these “archival” photographs are very clearly the actors and not real historical figures. *Northern Limit Line* and *Operation Chromite* reflect a trend in realism by combining archival imagery, historical content, and the photograph as memorialization technique in a filmic context that resembles a museum experience. The museumification of Korean War memories in these films signals a turning point in the representation of the Korean War in popular blockbuster cinema, as film techniques blur together with memorial techniques to create a process of memorialization all within the narrative contexts of these films.

*Northern Limit Line* follows the narrative of a typical war film – a new Navy crewmember, Park Dong-hyuk, joins the patrol boat 357 and slowly bonds with his fellow crewmembers and commanders. This takes place against the backdrop of increasing tensions with North Korea as well as the excitement of the 2002 FIFA World Cup, co-hosted by South Korea and Japan, in which South Korea advanced to the semifinals for the first time, causing massive “World Cup fever” to ripple throughout the country. In between crew bonding scenes, patrols, and navy drills, during one of their patrols, the crew encounters North Korean fishermen who cross over the Northern Limit Line, and are clearly suspicious, but due to the rules of

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<sup>123</sup> The majority of the plot invokes the spy thriller film and the theme of traitors/collaborators/double agents/spies that is popular in the post-2010s South Korean cinema (although this genre has always been popular). Recent Korean films in this cycle include *Assassination* (Choi Dong-hoon, 2015) and *The Age of Shadows* (Kim Jee-woon, 2016). Although this current cycle tends to focus on the Japanese colonial era, *Operation Chromite* centers Cold War tensions and its overlap with spy thriller films, which was explored in earlier Korean blockbusters such as *Shiri* (Kang Je-gyu, 1999) and *Silmido* (Kang Woo-suk, 2003), and in films of the Golden Age periods such as *The Hand of Destiny* (Han Hyeong-mo, 1954).

engagement and the command of his superiors, the commander of the ship is forced to allow them to return to North Korea. Eventually, one of the fishermen is revealed to be a commander of a North Korean warship, who used the opportunity to be detained by the South Koreans to scope out the functionality of their warship. Furthermore, he is the first to directly engage in battle with the South Koreans later in the film, which is the cinematic depiction of the Second Battle of Yeonpyeong.

*Northern Limit Line* begins with an intertitle about the historical events that it portrays: “This film is based on the real-life Naval clash between North and South Korea near the Northern Limit Line (NLL) in the Yellow Sea during the 2002 Korea/Japan World Cup.” It then moves on to video footage of the 2002 World Cup, including the immense crowds wearing red and cheering in the public square at City Hall and Han River Park. The footage then cuts to heavily injured soldiers being rushed to the emergency room and the voice of a soldier – the main character Pak Tonghyōk – narrating: “We wanted everyone to return home alive. It was a desperate battle for survival. We screamed, and fought alone.” Interspersed with scenes of World Cup crowds, he continues, “Saturday, June 29, 2002, Date of the consolation match against Turkey,” while one of the fans in the crowd looks upward at the military helicopters flying overhead. Pak Tonghyōk (although the viewers at this point are unaware of who he is) is seen flat-lining in the hospital and upon resuscitation the film transitions to an introductory film that provides expository information about the Korean War.

These exposition films-within-a-film about historical events are becoming increasingly common and is the same opening technique used in *Operation Chromite*. Using digital renderings of maps and timelines followed by text-heavy information, these introductory historical videos resemble the type of short films that would be playing at a museum exhibit and would not appear out of place in someplace like the War Memorial of Korea in their short distillation of major historical events and contextual background. The usage of these films is perhaps the clearest example of how contemporary Korean War films increasingly utilize museum techniques to share knowledge with audiences.

In the case of the introductory video of *Northern Limit Line*, the background graphics include a dynamic map of the Korean peninsula interspersed with Korean War archival videos and several facts, illustrated by graphics demarcating borders such as the NLL and important areas relevant to the content of the text. The text in this part of the film reads: “The 1953 Armistice Agreement gave control of islands on NLL to United States Command and South Korea. Any lands above Northern Limit Line belonged to China and North Korea. By taking control of the islands, the North accepted the NLL.” The film then shows the title screen and begins in June 2002 with the introduction of the main characters, Pak Tonghyōk’s first day on duty, and meeting all of his fellow crew. The introductory video separates the beginning of the film – after the battle is over – and the beginning of the events that lead up to the soldiers becoming injured, creating a disjuncture in the typical seamless connection between the “present” and the flashback.

Furthermore, the text in the film, coupled with the dynamic background imagery that resembles museum exhibition graphics, establishes the context with historical authority that would not exist solely from representing the events alone. However, the text does not address that the Northern Limit Line is a contested maritime demarcation line; rather, the NLL as depicted in the background map is taken as a de facto maritime boundary agreed upon by both South Korea and North

Korea. The reasoning is also somewhat suspect – North Korea’s occupation of several key islands is given as justification for recognition of the NLL, but if North Korea truly recognized the NLL as the border, would that not be enough to mention? There is a leap in logic in assuming that because North Korea occupied certain islands, it is an implicit recognition of the NLL when North Korea could very well be occupying those islands because the country may believe that the borders of the NLL do not bind them. This is the basis for why Yeonpyeong Island (and the areas around it), controlled by South Korea but sitting very close to the NLL and the North Korean mainland, has seen so many maritime and land conflicts, most recently in 2010 with North Korean shelling of the island and the sinking of the *Cheonan* warship.

Notably, the armistice agreement does not mention a specific maritime demarcation line with coordinates, but it does mention the coordinates of the islands specifically under control. Nevertheless, despite the contested nature of the NLL either after the signing of the 1953 armistice or in more recent years, the film makes a matter-of-fact statement that places the events of the Second Battle of Yeonpyeong squarely upon the responsibility of North Korea predicated on a clear and unambiguous understanding of the borders and boundaries of the NLL. In this way, the film sets up from the beginning sympathy for the South Korean characters and grants little humanity to the North Koreans unlike previous Korean War films like *JSA* and *Welcome to Dongmakgol*, and mirrors the language used in national war memorial exhibition texts that points to archival evidence as clear examples of North Korean provocation on South Koreans as evidence for beginning of Korean War.

Another notable difference in the film *Northern Limit Line* is in its portrayal of the moral superiority of the South Koreans as opposed to more ambivalent or downright negative portrayals of the South Korean military during the Korean War or “post”-Korean War-related conflict. Most notably, this portrayal is done through showcasing strict military discipline even in the soldiers’ downtime or when they are bending the rules; whereas, in previous films, where soldiers are oftentimes openly subversive of military authority, *Northern Limit Line* toes the line between discipline and fun, yet ultimately emphasizes the professionalism of the soldiers despite their personal flaws or collective playtime. A downplayed example is shown early in the film when several soldiers gather to cook and eat their ship’s specialty, blue crab noodles (the Yellow Sea where the boats patrol is particularly famous for blue crabs) together and are caught by their commander, who immediately punish them for their actions. When the CPO (one of the chefs) carries out the punishment of “100 punishments,” the soldiers first shout out the proper orders and eventually devolve into shouting out “blue crab” and “noodles” during their push-up rounds, but return to the proper orders by the end of the scene, showcasing that while the soldiers are able to have some fun, overall they maintain the disciplinary regime of the ship and military.

Perhaps the most important form of entertainment on the ship, which also marks the passage of time, is their enthusiasm for watching the World Cup, particularly the South Korean matches. Despite shirking their duties momentarily to watch the games, this form of entertainment is a nationally-sanctioned activity, as it is imbued with national pride – the crewmembers even embrace the World Cup fever by drawing Korean flags on their stomachs and faces and erupting into the famous “*Taehanmin’guk*” cheer. Notably though, the soldiers still immediately spring back into duty as their viewing of the game is interrupted by emergency drills, emphasizing not only their patriotism when it comes to entertainment, but also their devotion as



soldiers. Later in the film, the newest crewmember also asks the commander for permission to watch the game as reward, particularly after they perfect their practice drills, reaching a low of 26 seconds. Receiving permission, the entire crew is able to watch and enjoy the game together, celebrating in style along with the archival footage of the crowds and the South Korea v. Germany match. In this film, despite the soldiers' enjoyment of downtime and fun, and it is always in connections with scenes showing their military prowess and preparation, nationalism and national pride, and respect for the chain of command.

This marks a significant departure from earlier Korean War films that oftentimes portrayed South Korean soldiers in more ambivalent ways. As David Scott Diffrient writes in his article, it was not uncommon for Korean War films to portray soldiers carrying out dubious actions or to eschew military discipline completely:

However, this is not because of the ship's condition as the men's lack of discipline – namely, their failure to conform to the preconceived notions of social decorum and public etiquette held by government officials as well as audience members....Whether groping the breasts and legs of barmaids or brushing each other's teeth to get rid of the stench of alcohol, their insouciance says a great deal about the corporeal demands of war (and the war film).<sup>124</sup>

While the films that he discusses originate from an earlier period and make extensive use of blending multiple genres – comedy, melodrama, the musical, etc. – within the war film genre, this type of military (un)discipline can be seen in more contemporary films as well such as *JSA*, *Welcome to Dongmakgol*, and *The Front Line*.<sup>125</sup> While much of the hesitation and ignoring/subversion of military protocols that appear in these films serve to emphasize the tragedy of war, this newer cycle of Korean War films portray military service members who are always capable and even continue to fulfill their duty even to the point of extreme bodily incapacitation or death, which is a trope heavily – and graphically – played up in *Northern Limit Line*, as the crewmembers still continue their duties despite missing limbs and multiple gunshot wounds.

Furthermore, the soldiers' sense of duty and discipline are shown in scenes in which they engage directly with North Koreans. In the scene near the beginning when

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<sup>124</sup> David Scott Diffrient, "'Military Enlightenment' for the Masses: Generic and Cultural Intermixing in South Korea's Golden Age War Films," *Cinema Journal* 45.1 (Fall 2005): 32.

<sup>125</sup> While *JSA* does end with the shooting of the North Korean soldier due to instinctive training reflexes, much of the content of the film involves a direct subversion of Korean War/Cold War structures of division through the meeting and development of friendship among the North Korean and South Korean DMZ border guards. That each official documentation of the "true" events of the film contradicts one another (South Korean account, North Korean account, Lee Soo-hyök's account, and finally Sophie's investigation results) demonstrate the pointlessness of the investigation (confirmed within the film too by one of the characters) and the artifice of military protocols. *Welcome to Dongmakgol's* South Korean soldiers are shown to be particularly incompetent soldiers, and one of the character's introduction is his attempt at suicide after desertion. Furthermore, like in *JSA*, the North Korean and South Korean soldiers form friendships and even remove their military uniforms to briefly become farmers in the village, finally re-donning their uniforms only to take on U.S. forces together.

the crew encounter and capture the North Korean “fisherman,” the commander, despite recognizing that something is off, has to let the group return to North Korea due to a command from his superior. The man who eventually turns out to be a commander of the North Korean warship that attacks even pointedly tells the South Korean commander to get this gun “out of his face,” even removing his blindfold, confident that the South Koreans will not shoot. A mantra is repeated throughout the film that makes clear that South Koreans are not to engage first with the North Koreans. The superior fleet commander tells the South Korean captain to let the North Koreans go by relaying his orders: “They could be intruders, but there’s a no-clash order, so release them.” Even when another soldier remarks that “it’s obvious they’re not fishermen” the commander responds by saying, “Did you not hear the order?” This allows the North Koreans to use their capture to acquire intelligence about the structure of their ship and the weapons on board, leading directly to the formation of the military strategy that would be unleashed later in the film. Even in the actual battle near the end of the film, although the soldiers notice something off with the approach of the North Korean battleship, as well as the people in the Navy headquarters in Pyeongtaek monitoring the situation, the order is to “not fire first.” Repeated only a few minutes later, another order is given: “Listen, until they fire first, do not fire your weapons.” While this is standard military protocol, it is also repeated to emphasize that the sole responsibility for the military conflict lies with North Korea, as in the opening text of the film where North Korea’s understanding and acceptance of the boundaries of the Northern Limit Line is emphasized. Even as the soldiers recognize that an attack is eminent and there is no immediate order from the HQ, the South Korean ship commander again emphasizes that, “We cannot open fire first. Rules of engagement in effect.” This eventually leads to the ship sustaining a direct cannon attack from the North Koreans.

While the following of military protocol is important in preventing an outbreak of war, the emphasis on the North Korean ship attacking first throughout the film, coupled with the South Korean soldiers’ adherence to not attacking first despite knowing that something is off, calls back to the emphasis of the beginning of the Korean War as happening on June 25, 1950, in which North Koreans first crossed the border and began the attack on the South. This is repeated throughout the War Memorial of Korea, laying full culpability of the Korean War to the North Koreans with the backing of the USSR and the PRC, represented in museum exhibits with large renderings of the heads of Kim Il-sung, Joseph Stalin, and Mao Zedong. The plaque explaining the most prominent outdoor monument at the War Memorial of Korea, the Monument in Remembrance of the Korean War, which sits at the entrance of the museum memorial complex, also references the beginning of the Korean War as an “illegal invasion of the South” on the morning of June 25, 1950. The 6.25 narrative emphasizes the beginning of the Korean War with this invasion, and is the dominant historical understanding of the war as well as the narrative utilized in national museums and memorials in South Korea. The repetition and showcasing of North Korea’s initial attack in the film *Northern Limit Line* seems to also refer to the outbreak of the Korean War as well.

In fact, a replica of the Chamsuri 357 sits in the outdoor exhibition of the War Memorial of Korea, and visitors can climb onto the boat and look through some of the interior as well. In a recent revisit to the War Memorial of Korea in July 2018, the exhibit was expanded to include a small exhibition hall with testimonies of the surviving soldiers and a movie theater within the replica ship that shows a video about

the incident and advertisements that tie in with the film *Northern Limit Line*. In this sense, the film/memorial/museum complexes are explicitly interconnected. Film representations are shown within memorial replicas of the ship within the larger war memorial and museum complex. Furthermore, on the replica ship, bullet holes are emphasized with an outline of red tape. Alongside other military machinery in the outdoor exhibition, the Chamsuri 357 stands out as an example of the evidence of North Korea's brutal attack as it is the only exhibit to feature damages as part of the exhibit content. The plaque also references the suddenness of the attack:

In the midst of the World Cup co-hosted by Korea and Japan on June 29, 2002, North Korean patrol boats crossed the Northern Limit Line. South Korean patrol boats were immediately dispatched and warned them to turn back. Without warning the North Korean patrol boats opened fire sinking PKM 357 and killing six sailors. South Korean patrol boats countered the attack sinking two North Korean vessels and inflicting 30 casualties on them.

The exhibit PKM 357 is a life-size replica. The original PKM 357 is exhibited at the park of the Second Fleet Command, ROK Navy.

As the visitor moves through the exhibit, the extent of the damage is evidenced by the outline of red throughout the ship, as there is virtually no space untouched on the ship's walls by the red tape. Within the film, this damage is shown in intense and gory detail – not just on the ship's mechanical body, but also on the bodies of the soldiers. While war films in general utilize spectacularized violence, what makes the violence in *Northern Limit Line* particularly striking is that the accounts are based on real stories and are later described in detail by the surviving soldiers of the attack in the credits roll.

In fact, *Northern Limit Line*'s ending, similar to *Operation Chromite*, as I will discuss, sets it apart from other Korean War films because while it uses similar memorialization techniques as these previous films, the usage of photography/video is not just premised on an imagined past or imaginary point before conflict, but also are supplemented by actual archival footage, blurring the lines between the war film as memorial and memorials themselves who utilize similar techniques in Korean War memorialization efforts. In particular, the last scenes of the film after the battle scene depict the aftermath of the conflict, and the memorial service of the soldiers, although the film at this point itself becomes a memorial to the soldiers and the events of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battle of Yeonpyeong as well.

In fact, the film presents multiple different “endings” and multiple different forms of memorialization: archival news footage, memorial service footage, narrative remembrances by surviving family members and soldiers and excavation of the ship, alternate reality photograph and video memorialization, and lastly, credits-roll interviews with the actual survivors. Taken together, the film's narrative alone is not just allegorically a memorial to the events, but also the variety of film techniques transforms the film itself into a memorial quite literally. Aside from the narrative portions of this “memorial ending,” the last twenty minutes of this film could fit comfortably within the context of a museum exhibit, and would not feel out of place at the War Memorial of Korea. Walking through these different film memorial techniques in *Northern Limit Line*, I point out the significance in this change from earlier Korean War films to the present in the process of memorialization of the

events and the usage of archival images to create a new form of memorialization that points to the museumification of Korean War cinema.

After the portrayal of the battle, the television reports within the film also seems to draw attention to the ambiguity of recognition of the severity of the battle. Scenes of World Cup fans celebrating are interposed with captions that read: "Clash with North at NLL near Yeonpyeong Island. 24 sailors involved at skirmish. Patrol boat 357 sunk." Despite the importance of the news, all attention is focused on cheering fans, emphasizing the disparity in emotions between the grieving family members and the general population. The television is also turned on in the memorial hall honoring the dead soldiers; before the ceremony, surviving family members and fellow officers wait and watch the news. These news reports also seem to play up the disparity in recognition by showing news that seem to lack respect for the victims. One reporter states: "Despite deadly combat in the Yellow Sea yesterday, tours of Mount Kumgang in North Korea continued. 589 tourists completed their tour, and departed for the South Korean harbor." The next story then plays: "In order to attend the final game of the World Cup in Yokohama stadium, President Kim departed for Japan this morning, after being greeted by the Prime Minister." The father of the commander of Chamsuri 357 seems particularly perturbed by the news as he stands up to watch this report.

In these three news reports that are played diegetically, there is an emphasis on the lack of respect for the victims and an implication that the sacrifices made by these soldiers in the line of duty are not fully respected. Given that tourist visits to certain areas of North Korea are heavily regulated, the continuation of the Mount Kumgang tours seems to imply that the Yeonpyeong battle was of little significance so as to not affect inter-Korean relations. Perhaps more condemning is that the president at the time, Kim Dae-jung, was not present at the memorial service for the soldiers who died in this conflict, putting the World Cup events ahead in significance rather than lending his presence to the memorial for the dead soldiers. The reaction by the commander's bereaved father in which he suddenly becomes invested in the news report and wears a particularly disappointed look can be read as a larger condemnation of not only the presidential actions, but also more broadly of the Sunshine Policy era in which inter-Korean reconciliation is often seen as more important than specific North Korean crimes and corruption.

Youngmin Choe writes of the significance of representation of inter-Korean relations in blockbuster cinema:

...the cinematic narrative of North/South Korean relations, as told through the depositions of suspects and investigators' reports against the background of believable historical circumstances, can also be said to constitute a history of how popular culture imagines these political relations. Given this environment, in which popular art is bestowed with the serious task of transmitting historical material, one can see how conditions become ripe for transformations, distortions, and realignments in the work of postmemory.<sup>126</sup>

Choe also writes of Korean cinema's focus on globalization to Asianization, shifting from more history-focused texts to memory-focused texts that focus on reunification

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<sup>126</sup> Youngmin Choe, "Postmemory DMZ in South Korean Cinema, 1999-2003," *Journal of Korean Studies* 18.2 (Fall 2013): 317.

and inter-Asian cooperation. Particularly, the DMZ as referenced in these films becomes more metaphorical in its allusions to borders that exist not just in geographical space, but also as borders preventing inter-Asian relations and transnational alliances. Choe alludes to the DMZ as represented in these films, specifically *Yesterday* and *2009: Lost Memories* as a memorial space: “The DMZ in these films, in its various forms, functions as a kind of museum space, one that functions less in the geospatial terms sketched out in *JSA*, as a border between nations with a specific history, and more in onto-spatial terms as a trope that helps one probe and negotiate the changing coordinates of the relationship between self and other.”<sup>127</sup> However, with the current trend in Korean War cinema, the DMZ and the Korean War seems to have re-embraced the historical trend – for example, *Northern Limit Line* bookends the narrative elements of the film with informational graphics and archival images. In this sense, the conflict within the film no longer “functions as a kind of museum space,” as in the films that Choe discusses; rather, it is the film itself that becomes the museum space.

Perhaps one of the most striking ways in which the film makes use of museum techniques is the insertion of archival footage besides diegetic news reports. Most notably, this is seen in the funeral service for the crewmembers. It begins with the actors performing a military funeral and after lingering on the faces of the main characters, suddenly shifts to archival video of the funeral service – the quality of the video image changes quite suddenly so the transition is made apparent. The military procession is shown, as well as the laying of flowers by surviving family members onto the offering table in which the memorial photographs of the dead soldiers rest. One woman, perhaps the mother of one of the soldiers, is physically carried by two soldiers to the memorial altar after she collapses with grief. The footage goes on for several minutes, including the soldiers’ burial at the Seoul National Cemetery. The film then goes on to narrative segments after this portion, but the inclusion of the real memorial service, instead of a representation of the memorial service, speaks to the increasing focus on incorporating historical archives in contemporary Korean War films. The archival video footage lends authenticity to the film’s conveying of knowledge and also blurs the line between narrative entertainment film and documentary, reinforcing the narrative claims on the part of the fictional film but also the imaginary representation of historical events of where there exist no immediate images, such as the battle. This is the technique that is used in museums to most effectively convey historical facts while providing entertainment to visitors, and it is particularly striking to see the transition from usage of archival videos in the background such as news reports to the full-scale transition to archival video, which does not make use of the same actors but uses the real faces of survivors and family members. The materiality of memory, and its emphasis in film, points to the similarities between museum displays and narrative presentations of memorialization in Korean War cinema.

The other significant narrative scene of memorialization, which ties together military discipline as well as perhaps unintentionally alluding to contemporary events through its news reports,<sup>128</sup> is in the new recruit Tonghyök’s death scene. Throughout

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid, 332.

<sup>128</sup> The diving and rescue scenes seem to parallel the news reports on the sinking of the Sewol ferry a year before the release of the films, although at the time of the film’s release in 2015, some of the students’ bodies were still not fully recovered and the ship

the ending of the film, he is shown to be slowly recovering, eventually waking up from the coma to news of the recovery of his superior's body from the sunken remains of the Chamsuri 357. The news reporter states: "The Navy assumed that due to extreme tidal activity the search mission would be delayed, but they decided to continue the search for Chamsuri 357's CPO Han Sang-guk thanks to milder sea conditions." While Tonghyŏk and his mother watch the news report, the scene then cuts to the rescue divers who mention that because of the ship's straight position, "someone must've manned the vessel while it was sinking." In fact, CPO Han's death was played up as one of the most tragic throughout the battle, as he has a condition that causes his hand to be shaky, which would have eventually led to his forced transfer – although without mention of the condition because of his loyalty – if it had not been for the fateful battle. Despite his condition and taking numerous bullet and shrapnel wounds, he maintains a steady hand on the wheel, and when his body gives out, he forcibly ties his hand to the wheel ensuring that he will take the soldiers home at any cost, which is what would allow for the ship to be recovered in South Korean waters. When the divers discover the body, his hand is still tied to the wheel, emphasizing the connection between the soldier's body to the machine and metaphorically to his duty to the nation. The diver is visibly emotional as he unties Sang-guk and takes him "home." Back in the hospital, Tonghyŏk watches the archival news reports that indicate: "CPO Han Sang-guk found." Despite wrapped up in tubes and bandages and appearing to be in great pain, Tonghyŏk forces himself to sit up and salute the television in memory of his friend and superior. After the transition to a narrative scene in which the *t'aegukki* is draped over the remains of CPO Han, the next scene shows Tonghyŏk flat-lining and despite attempts at resuscitation, he is pronounced dead. His last action of a salute right before his death only drives home the intense sense of duty among the soldiers, reinforced in all earlier portions of the film, and the pronounced tragedy of the soldiers' sacrifice during the World Cup events.

Yet, the World Cup is not entirely vilified; rather, it seems as if it is only the fans and the President's actions (or lack thereof) that seem to be subtly questioned. Furthermore, this film does not completely abandon the alternate reality endings that seem to be particularly prevalent in Korean War films since the early 2000s. In fact, the last diegetic scene of the film is precisely an alternate future ending, which bypasses the memorialization technique used in films such as *JSA*, *Welcome to Dongmakgol*, and *The Front Line* – memorializing characters and relationships before major events – to fully allow audiences to imagine the "what could have been" for the soldiers of Chamsuri 357 if the conflict had never happened.

In this scene, the commander asks the soldiers, "What day is today?" to which they respond "The Turkey game!" The commander then tells them to "cheer your heart out." The soldiers then all gather together, along with the commander, who finally joins them in watching and has his face painted with a taegukgi, to watch the game. They give the final cheer and the film ends on a freeze frame of this moment, which gradually fades into grayscale, resembling the photographic ends that are common for Korean War cinema. What is particularly unique about *Northern Limit Line*'s ending is that it is purely imaginary and the freeze-frame exists solely as film

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had not been raised. For more on representations of the Sewol disaster see Hong Kal, "The Art of Witnessing: The Sewol Ferry Disaster in Hong Sung-dam's Paintings," *Korean Studies* 43 (2019): 96-119.

technique, rather than as a revelation of a photograph or videos taken in an earlier part of the film. In fact, the soldiers were attacked before this match and were unable to watch. Unlike the theme of going back to the past to prevent the mistakes of the future as in the memorialization scenes in *JSA*, *Northern Limit Line* instead ends on an imaginary alternate future ending in which the attack had never happened and the soldiers are able to fulfill their wish of watching the historic Turkey-South Korea semifinals World Cup game.

The transition from memorialization within the film taking place in the diegesis to the film functioning as memorial itself of futures lost precisely marks the turning point in Korean War filmic representation. While *JSA* points to an ending in which the memorial is to a time before the North Korean and South Korean soldiers meet one another that lends equal culpability to both North Koreans and South Koreans for attempting small-scale reconciliation and reunification (and in which South Koreans often provoke the first shot such as crossing over the border or shooting first), *Northern Limit Line* memorializes the lost futures of soldiers who would have survived were it not for an unprovoked North Korean attack, devoting themselves even in their entertainment preferences to national (South Korean) pride – the *taehanmin'guk* cheer echoes on even during the freeze-frame – rather than to a spirit of inter-Korean reconciliation.

As if the variety of endings were not enough to mark the museumification of the film, the post-diegesis ending and credits continues onwards to incorporate more informational text, as well as interviews with the survivors of the Chamsuri 357. The informational text reads:

The sailors of Chamsuri 357 dedicated their lives to patrol the Northern Limit Line. Rules of engagement were updated for quicker responses, in order to ensure the safety of all soldiers. CPO Han Sang-guk's wife currently resides and works in Gwangju, Gyeonggi Province. CPO Park Kyung-soo survived the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battle of Yeon-pyeong but was later killed in 2010 on a different battleship. This movie honors Lt. Cdr. Yoon Young-ha, CPO Han Sang-guk, CPO Cho Chun-hyung, CPO Hwang Do-hyun, CPO Suh Hu-won, Petty officer Park Dong-hyuk and the 22 soldiers that risked their lives on that fatal day. Thank you to all who supported the making of this film.

Additional archival footage is then presented of Navy soldiers celebrating while watching the historic World Cup games, and a news anchor announcing: "As Park Ji-sung scores the game-deciding goal, the sailors in the base erupted in joy. This is the roar of our soldiers who are guarding the Yellow Sea. Their joyous cheers have reached the Incheon stadium. In order for the games to continue without a hitch, they are on full alert." The commander of the ship, 357 Lt. Cdr. Yoon Young-ha, is also shown in an archival interview (looking different from the actor) about his World Cup pride: "Even though we cannot be at the stadium in person, we'll cheer our team toward the quarter-finals." This archival footage reinforces the narrative elements throughout the film, and the ending honors the names of the dead soldiers as in a memorial that incorporates a wall of names, and also includes the imaginary scene that provides some wish fulfillment for the soldiers, living and dead, which is to cheer on the South Korean team while working to defend its borders. Thus, this is a very different type of film that marks different political tensions of the time – while the events took place during the Sunshine Policy period and when films like *JSA* and

*Welcome to Dongmakgol* were being made, the 10-year gap in the making of these films marks a significantly different understanding of this period and of inter-Korean relations and the promise of reunification.

As the credits roll, surviving soldiers describe the battle in their own words, lending more authenticity to the events portrayed in the film. They describe in gory detail what the viewers saw with their own eyes, confirming that the images of violence were accurate and not spectacularized for dramatic effect as in other war films. Former 357 Comm. Officer Kim Young-tae describes: "Radar specialist PO3 Cho Hyun-jin was so badly injured that I was in shock. He was hit with shrapnel in the head, and his intestines were coming out from a wound in his side, he asked what it was, and tried to put it back in, and we held him close." Former 357 Artillery CPO Jeon Chang-sung describes further: "Lt. Commander had a pool of blood under him, behind him, PO2 Kwon Ki-hyung's...hand was torn apart. He was screaming. Lt. Lee Hee-wan's leg was blown up, but he kept giving us orders in that state." These are events that were shown in great detail earlier in the film, and the interviews together with the film narrative work together as a process of memorialization for these events, similar to what might occur in a museum space or exhibition.

The epigraph that begins this section in which PO2 Kim Seung-hwan discusses his dream about the soldiers who died coming back and fighting again, and the interviews in which other survivors of the attack discuss their survivor guilt, and how they miss their fellow soldiers, coupled with photographs of the dead soldiers on the ship or in family photographs, serve as a specific form of memorialization that is often featured in museum exhibitions – talking head interviews of survivors who describe their experiences and memories of the events, as well as memorabilia that honors the lives of those who died. The film is able to fulfill the wishes of the survivors – it does indeed relive the battle and preserve the moving-image of the fellow soldiers before their deaths in a way that would not be possible in reality. Furthermore, the film grants the imaginary wish of the soldiers in being able to watch the games, which they were unable to fulfill due to the timing of the attack. For the real soldiers to exist together in the same space as fictional representations, archival news footage and photographs, videos of the memorial service, and imaginary future marks the changing functions of memorialization in Korean War cinema and the turn towards historicity while at the same time the blurring of the boundaries between history and memory, coming together in a film that is neither solely film nor museum, but a memorial to the events of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battle of Yeonpyeong.

"What I mean is...when a man is dying in pain, would he admire the beautiful sky?"

- Captain Chang Haksu

Unlike *Northern Limit Line*, *Operation Chromite* takes place during the Korean War, focusing on the events that led to the Battle of Incheon and the famous Incheon Landing, which changed the tide of the Korean War in 1950 in favor of the U.S., UN, and ROK forces. Like *Northern Limit Line*, this film also has a more conservative bent in its representation of the war and inter-Korean relations. While the film does not rely on archival footage in quite the same way as *Northern Limit Line* because of the earlier time period, *Operation Chromite* does rely on archival images and backdrops and treats the soldiers as documentary subjects in the absence of survivors to interview. Like other Korean War films, this film also ends with the photographic image as memorial, as well as beginning and ending with museum-like



graphics and text like in *Northern Limit Line*, continuing the trend of the museumification of Korean War cinema.

The film also follows the cycle of collaboration/double spy/espionage thriller films of the 2010s, and the leader of the mission to gather intelligence on Incheon Harbor is Chang Haksu, played by Lee Jung-jae who plays a similar character in the film *Assassination* (Choi Dong-hoon, 2015). In *Operation Chromite*, Chang Haksu is a North Korean defector who joins the ROK after witnessing the execution of his father; he pledges his loyalty wholeheartedly to General Douglas MacArthur and does everything in his power to ensure the successful completion of his mission, along with his small 7-man X-Ray unit. He finds immediate trouble when confronted by North Korean Commander Rim Gyejin, who suspects him from the beginning, and much of the film focuses on the successful carrying out of the espionage operation along with the unit's alliances and collaboration with other North Koreans in Incheon.

Similar to *Northern Limit Line*, most of the narrative content of *Operation Chromite* focuses on the legitimization of the South Korean nation either through dialogue in which North Korean ideology and Communism is directly questioned or challenged, or through the usage of sets that emphasize South Korea's lineage of independence fighters (a lineage that is also invoked by North Korea). This mirrors the narrative of patriotic lineage that can be found in the War Memorial of Korea as well.<sup>129</sup> In particular, scenes in which the X-Ray unit plan out their missions is often done in basements of houses that used to belong to independence fighters during the Japanese colonial era and signs featuring the phrase "Korean independence" can be seen in the backdrops.<sup>130</sup> One of the North Koreans who works as an informant explains: "Freedom fighters hid here during the Japanese imperialism." These backdrops feature the Korean independence flag – similar to the modern *t'aegukki* in design – and are found in the background every time Chang Haksu is in a position of leadership, the flag remaining just out of focus while reminding viewers of his allegiances. Scenes in which the platoon members are crowded around a table with Haksu leading, and with the flag in the background, only serve to reinforce and legitimize South Korean's moral hegemony and legacy of patriotism and independence during the Korean War period, as well as drawing a clear genealogical line between independence fighters and South Korean soldiers during the Korean War.

Furthermore, Chang Haksu and his main antagonist, Rim Gyejin, often disagree with each other about North Korean politics from the beginning of the film. Rim Gyejin is shown to behave ruthlessly and oftentimes his "evilness" is played up to almost cartoonish hyperbolic proportions that would feel out of place in earlier films like *JSA* and *Welcome to Dongmakgol*, which emphasizes similarities between North Koreans and South Koreans. The final showdown between the two at the end of the film, in which both are heavily injured and continue to shoot at one another, resembles a similar showdown in an earlier Korean War blockbuster film, *Shiri* (Kang Je-gyu, 1999), but with a far less sympathetic North Korean soldier. Rim Gyejin asks, "What's there to communism? It's all about wanting a better life together, isn't it? ... No matter what you Yankee puppets do, the red flag will march forward!" However,

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<sup>129</sup> Sheila Miyoshi Jager, "Monumental Histories: Manliness, the Military, and the War Memorial," *Public Culture* 14.2 (2002): 387-410.

<sup>130</sup> These scenes of planning would not seem out of place in a Japanese colonial-era spy thriller like *Assassination* or *The Age of Shadows* (Kim Jee-woon, 2016).

throughout the film, the brutal actions of Rim are shown in great detail – from stringing up the bodies of the unit members and civilians that he executed to not even hesitating to shoot his own subordinates for mistakes they made. In contrast, despite Rim’s guessing that General MacArthur is only interested in pursuing the Incheon Operation because of future plans to become president, MacArthur’s motivations are shown, in black-and-white flashbacks, to be altruistic and motivated by the Korean people that he met, including Chang, who want to fight for a “better life.”

However, in this film, it is clear that South Korea’s vision of the future better life is in contrast to North Korean brutality. This is reinforced with the recapture of Incheon and the replacement of North Korean Communist slogans with the *t’aegukki* and civilians cheering on the U.S. and ROK soldiers. Before the film fades out to the “archival” talking head portions at the end, Haksu’s mother, who is in the crowd, looks out for her son and temporarily hallucinates him in the crowd of soldiers only to realize that the face belongs to someone else. Nevertheless, as her face takes on a pained expression, she never stops waving the *t’aegukki* and continues to do so with increased fervor and desperation as the film fades out. This last image serves to reinforce patriotism and nationalism familiar in earlier scenes of Haksu speaking in front of the flag, as well as the devotion to the South Korean flag in *Northern Limit Line*.

The beginning and ending of the film, like *Northern Limit Line*, also utilizes archival-like documents and photographs to memorialize the events within the film, as well as to educate the audiences about the Korean War. Like the introductory graphics and text of *Northern Limit Line*, the introductory segment of *Operation Chromite* also resembles a video that would not be out of place in a museum exhibition. After the introduction of the phone call showcasing Liam Neeson as General Douglas MacArthur gearing up in preparation for the risky Incheon Operation Landing, the opening museum-like informational graphics and text begins, setting the context for the Korean War:

June 25, 1950. With the Soviet Union’s support, North Korea invades the South.  
June 27, 1950. USA President Truman deploys the U.S. Army and assigns General Douglas MacArthur as the Commander-in-chief of the UN Command. However, the rest of South Korea, north of the Nakdong River, falls in a month. In order to turn the tide of war, Gen. MacArthur orders a covert operation involving 8 men.

The high-quality graphics with maps, photographs, and dynamic text demonstrate the new trend in Korean War films; unlike earlier films that may rely on intertitles only to describe battles, locations, and dates, the new introductory video with graphics akin to museum text seems to be a pattern that is beginning to be used in recent war films. Compared to the flashbacks that portray the “truth” in a film like *JSA* where four different accounts yield vastly different stories to the point that the viewer may question if the last “truth” may actually be accurate at all,<sup>131</sup> *Ode to My Father*, *Northern Limit Line*, and *Operation Chromite* make clear that they are portrayals of authoritative truth-claims.

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<sup>131</sup> This type of re-presented story is similar to the Japanese film *Rashomon* (Akira Kurosawa, 1950).

This is reinforced at the end of the film when, absent of surviving talking head interviews, the unit members – via their actors – are temporarily resurrected from death to discuss their motivations for joining the cause. As none of the soldiers featured in the film end up surviving the operation, it is particularly striking to see their talking head interviews as if they were taking part in a documentary project, mirroring the post-diegetic end of *Northern Limit Line*. This talking head interview format takes the place of the ending video or photograph in earlier films, as each character describes their individual motivations, which functions as a memorial for each character. The answers range from mundane motivations (wanting to prove oneself) to survival (receiving rice to feed family) to upholding a family lineage (coming from a line of independence fighters), and there is a bit of humor to the soldiers' answers, as well as tragedy, since the audience knows that no one survives. Together with Haksu, they then end up taking a commemorative photograph, which quickly fades from color to an archival sepia-toned coloring. This is then overlaid with an actual archival photograph of the soldiers who took part in this operation followed by a dedication: "To the 15 men who died during Mission X-RAY, including Lieutenant Lim Byung-Re, Sergeant Hong Si-Wook and members of KLO, and those who sacrificed their lives for Korea's freedom and peace, we dedicate this film to them and their families." A post-script is also added, continuing on from the introductory information: "13 days after the successful landing operation of Incheon, on September 15, 1950, the UN Allied Forces reclaimed Seoul. They went on to take Pyeongyang, but the Chinese army drove them back. On July 27, 1953, an armistice was reached, drawing the war to an end after 3 years with over 3 million casualties." The intermixing of narrative elements with archival documents and specific dedications and historical information speaks to the film's functioning as a memorial similar to the ending of *Northern Limit Line*.

Furthermore, it is assumed that the talking head interviews and commemorative photograph at the end of the film take place before the events of this film, but it is also entirely possible to read these last scenes as imaginary endings akin to the World Cup scene in *Northern Limit Line*, in which the soldiers had survived the operation and are able to talk about their motivations in a humorous manner because they were able to see their end goal, which is "Korea's freedom and peace." As discussed in the previous chapter on Korean War transpacific memorials, "sacrifice," "freedom," and "peace" in this film are seen as outcomes of a successful and victorious Korean War that ended in 1953.

This is perhaps most evident in Chang Haksu's dying scene. For context, at the beginning of the film, before he murders a North Korean official in order to replace him and take his identity, he asks the soldier about the book that he is reading and ominously asks him about the dying moments of the character in the book: "At the end, the protagonist gets shot, and while dying, he looks up at the blue sky. But...Sholokhov describes the blue sky with a beautiful metaphor, and I'm saying that is a lie. What I mean is...when a man is dying in pain, would he admire the beautiful sky?" Ironically, Haksu's death scene ends in precisely this way. As Haksu is dying from his wounds, he looks up towards the sky to see U.S. airplanes flying overhead and has flashbacks of his dead unit members. He gazes up not just to only see the sky, but also the U.S. planes flying overhead that signify the success of his mission, ending up dying a romanticized death akin to the protagonist in the novel.

This scene is particularly noteworthy not just for the circularity of the narrative, but also for the scene's similarity to the ending scenes of *Welcome to*

*Dongmakgol*. In that film, the soldiers see similar images of U.S. planes flying overhead; however, these images signify immediate threat as the planes shoot to death each soldier in the North Korean-South Korean joint task force, eventually raining bombs upon the surviving soldiers. It is the last facial expressions of fright, which turns into happiness (because of their success in averting the death of innocent villagers), on the faces of the “joint task force” as opposed to the peace and security in Chang Haksu’s eyes in *Operation Chromite* that mark the greatest difference in the ten-year span of Korean War films. The collective smiles and intimate gazes of the North Korean and South Korean soldiers, directed at one another, as opposed to the look that Chang Haksu gives to the U.S. airplanes, speaks to the changing depictions of inter-Korean relations in contemporary South Korean cinema.

The impending doom in this scene in *Welcome to Dongmakgol* changes to happiness, reflected in the interchanging of glances between the soldiers and their defiant gazes back at the U.S. airplanes, signifies the imaginative power of inter-Korean intimacy and the fantasy of South Korean-North Korean friendships that are found in the Korean War blockbuster films in the 2000s discussed in the previous chapter. In stark contrast, Chang Haksu dies alone on the beach, gazing up at the “beautiful sky” and the U.S. airplanes flying above, knowing that he has successfully carried out the mission that paved the way for the successful Incheon Landing Operation, which allowed for turning the tides of war. His facial expression gives off an affect of relief, but also of gratitude, and reflects the growing trend towards South Korean resiliency and cooperation with U.S. forces in the post-2010s Korean War blockbuster films, which match the affects found in museum and memorial complexes – the “freedom is not free” mantra – discussed in the first chapter. By documenting the changing trends in blockbuster Korean War cinema, these chapters work to showcase how memory of the Korean War is continually contested and re-presented, showcasing the dynamic flows of memory and memorialization in the contemporary “post”-Cold War era. The next chapter examines memorial texts beyond the spaces of films and museums by focusing on representations of the temporality of the Korean War, and participatory and site-specific art projects and exhibitions that open up possibilities for engaging directly and indirectly with memory of the Korean War in the present conjuncture.

## Chapter 4

### Broadening the Temporal and Spatial Scope of the Korean War: Performing Art and Trauma at the Civilian Control Line (CCL) and Gwangju, South Korea

Kuan-Hsing Chen, in his 2010 book *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization*, asserts that East Asian nations must undergo a process of “de-cold war.” Drawing from examples in Taiwan and South Korea, he argues that similar to decolonization, “de-cold war” means to grapple with the specific legacies of the Cold War on the lived experiences of people who are still affected by these Cold War ideologies and divisions. Heonik Kwon in *The Other Cold War* (2010) points to the spaces of the “locally specific” to problematize the singularity of Cold War narratives and also calls into question the ends of the Cold War as a slow “decomposition.” In other words, the Cold War did not end in 1989 as conventional histories indicate but still continues to linger on in the present as “an extended horizon of ‘what is not yet,’ a field of time-space that is open to creative political acting and moral imagining.”<sup>132</sup>

Building off of the scholarship of Chen and Kwon, I specifically locate culture as an understudied yet significant site of inquiry in understanding the global Cold War. Furthermore, the imaginative space of cultural productions is ripe for gleaning insight into the “what is not yet” of the unending Cold War, as shown in the previous chapters of the dissertation on Korean War cinema, memorials, and museums. To this extent, this chapter shifts to a different form of cultural production and focuses on two performance art exhibitions that grapple with the ongoing legacies of the Korean War and its locally specific realities beyond the hegemonic periodization of June 25, 1950 – July 27, 1953: the 2014 iteration of the REAL DMZ PROJECT and South Korean artist Minouk Lim’s *Navigation ID* at the 2014 Gwangju Biennale.

Both projects straddle the lines between traditional museum exhibition and performance art. The REAL DMZ PROJECT spans several locations across the Civilian Control Line (CCL) in South Korea, although the majority of the exhibitions are located in the city of Cheorwon. Minouk Lim’s *Navigation ID* is a powerful video, performance, and art piece that tracks two shipping containers filled with the remains of Bodo League massacre victims on their journey from individual family graves to the Gwangju Biennale space. The surviving family members of the massacres were then greeted by mothers of victims of the Gwangju Massacre in a public ceremony at the opening of the Biennale.

These projects allow for the communication of trauma by visual and performance artists affected by Korean division as well as by families of victims whose voices are often not accounted for in traditional museum spaces and historical narratives. However, what is most significant about these projects is that for the artists involved and for the person experiencing the exhibitions, Cold War and Korean War temporalities are further complicated than in the “new” Cold War studies scholarship. In other words, I argue that Cold War and Korean War temporalities are not just in the process of decomposing as in Kwon’s argument nor is this temporality recursive as in Jodi Kim’s 2010 book *Ends of Empire: Asian American Critique and the Cold War*.<sup>133</sup> Rather, the Korean War – and by larger extension the Cold War – and its

<sup>132</sup> Heonik Kwon, *The Other Cold War* (New York: New York University Press, 2010): 8.

<sup>133</sup> Jodi Kim, *Ends of Empire: Asian American Critique and the Cold War* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

temporalities are multiple, brushing up against other historical events. These temporalities exist palimpsestically along various other forms of state violence and wartime violence in South Korea that exceeds the Korean War. In fact, these exhibitions call forth a reading of the Cold War/Korean War temporality through referential understandings of other historical events, memories, and legacies – an inter-trauma referencing, borrowing from Kuan-Hsing Chen’s “Asia as method,” a call for “inter-Asian referencing.”<sup>134</sup>

Thus, this chapter asks, what new insights would be gained about the Korean War through reading the historical events of the Bodo League Massacre in the summer of 1950 alongside with the Gwangju Massacre, which occurred from May 18<sup>th</sup> – May 27<sup>th</sup>, 1980? How does the concept of Korean War memorialization begin to gain new ground through the inter-referencing of multiple temporalities and spaces of the Korean War? And how can we further complicate Korean War temporality in order to take into account the lived experience of the Korean War? By reading oppositional spaces to Cold War narratives through the artistic productions by survivors and descendants of survivors can we begin to imagine alternate undertakings of the Korean War and Cold War.

### **Cultural Productions and the New Cold War Studies Scholarship**

This chapter contributes to the “new” Cold War studies scholarship that has been emerging from various fields, including scholars such as Kuan-Hsing Chen,<sup>135</sup> Heonik Kwon,<sup>136</sup> and Masuda Hajimu,<sup>137</sup> and extends the points of inquiry into the study of cultural productions that exceed Cold War historical time yet are part of Cold War temporalities. Furthermore, in addition to the scholarship of the “new” Cold War that has incorporated anthropological, historical, and sociological perspectives, the study of the Cold War also benefits from the interdisciplinarity of a field such as ethnic studies and Asian American studies. Asian American studies scholars have also interrogated the Cold War and its legacies, most notably Jodi Kim who argues that the Cold War “continues to enjoy a persisting recursiveness when seen as a structure of feeling, a knowledge project, and a hermeneutics for interpreting developments in the ‘post’-Cold War conjuncture.”<sup>138</sup> This chapter acknowledges the work that has been done by area studies scholars and seeks to bridge the gap between scholars of “Asia” (and specifically Korean Studies) and Asian American studies. Furthermore, I also stress the importance of culture in order to understand the global Cold War and grapple with Cold War ideologies in the contemporary moment. After all, the imaginative space of cultural productions allows for wider readings of Cold War temporalities beyond the historical, sociological, or anthropological spheres. In this section, I delve in further detail into some of this “new” Cold War theoretical scholarship and connect it to recent work that reexamines the Korean War and state violence in South Korea. I particularly focus on the scholars’ discussion of the Cold

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<sup>134</sup> Kuan-Hsing Chen, *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Heonik Kwon, *The Other Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

<sup>137</sup> Masuda Hajimu, *Cold War Crucible: The Korean Conflict and the Postwar Period* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015).

<sup>138</sup> Jodi Kim, *Ends of Empire: Asian American Critique and the Cold War* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010): 3.

War and its protracted endings, as well as their discussions of the lived experiences of the Cold War, in order to further draw out the differential ways in which memory of the Korean War/Cold War period in South Korea continue to affect the present.

In this contemporary conjuncture, it is still necessary to explore how effects/affects of the Cold War continue after its proclaimed “end” in 1989 and into the 1990s with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the Soviet Union. However, it is also important to not just understand the Cold War as a slowly “decomposing” process, but also point to how the cultural productions – the REAL DMZ PROJECT and Minouk Lim’s *Navigation ID* – also call forth a reading of the Cold War and Korean War temporalities through referential understandings of other historical events, memories, and legacies.

Heonik Kwon, in *The Other Cold War*, writes of how histories of the Cold War tend to privilege Western histories and thus ignore that the Cold War was in fact a “hot war” for many countries in Asia and the global South. The Cold War was thus not just an ideological conflict between the Soviet Union and the U.S., but could be seen as a “global cold war” in which multiple other nations and states were implicated in these tensions that boiled over into “hot wars”: “In a wide definition, however, the global cold war also entails the unequal relations of power among the political communities that pursued or were driven to pursue a specific path of progress within the binary structure of the global order.”<sup>139</sup> Furthermore, the (global) Cold War also “consists of a multitude of these locally specific historical realities and variant human experiences, and this view conflicts with the dominant image of the cold war as a single, encompassing geopolitical order.”<sup>140</sup> Therefore, moving beyond non-Western or non-binary perspectives of the Cold War necessitates scholars to take into account “whose” and “which” cold wars, as well as the “locally specific resonances” of the Cold War. The case of South Korea, as an example of a geographic locale in which the Cold War has become “hot” through the Korean War, and with its “locally specific” contexts – the civil war within the larger international war<sup>141</sup> – complicates Cold War historicism.<sup>142</sup>

In relation to Cold War temporality, Kwon questions the “end” of the Cold War as well as much of Cold War historiography, which marks an end to the Cold War and the beginning of a new global era after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. He argues that “the historical turning point glossed as the end of the cold war is actually an extended horizon of ‘what is not yet,’ a field of time-space that is open to creative political acting and moral imagining.”<sup>143</sup> In earlier chapters, I argued that South Korean films from the late 1990s – mid-2000s attempt to showcase the “what is not yet” through visualizing alternative histories of the Korean War. Furthermore, the open-endedness of this “creative political acting and moral imagining” can be found through the innovative artistic works of the REAL DMZ PROJECT and Minouk Lim’s *Navigation ID*. These artistic projects push this concept further through also

<sup>139</sup> Heonik Kwon, *The Other Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010): 2.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid, 6-7.

<sup>141</sup> See Masuda Hajimu, *Cold War Crucible: The Korean Conflict and the Postwar World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015).

<sup>142</sup> Kwon, in his text, also points to examples such as Vietnam, where he conducted much of his fieldwork and on which he has published extensively, and Greece. Within South Korea, he draws on the example of Jeju Island, site of a civilian uprising and massacre (the 4.3 Incident) before the official beginning of the Korean War in 1948 – 1949.

<sup>143</sup> Heonik Kwon, *The Other Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010): 8.

utilizing geographic space and movement of bodies, as well as by actively subverting the power of the visual, specifically through incorporating sounds and performative gestures.

Furthermore, Kwon's theory of "decomposition" is particularly useful for describing Cold War temporality in relation to cultural productions. Kwon writes that the end of the Cold War is a slow "decomposition," time and space that is not quite divorced of the past yet still cannot fully imagine a future: it is an "unsettling situation in which the living reality is not really free from the immediate past and has not reintegrated the past into the time present as a past history – that is, it has a kind of spectral existence."<sup>144</sup> In this chapter, I not only explore the "spectral existence" of Cold War "decompositions," but also how these decomposing processes intersect with other traumatic decomposing temporalities in South Korea, such as the Gwangju Massacre of 1980.

Yet, it is important to also point out that the Cold War legacies in spaces like the DMZ and the CCZ (Civilian Control Zone) are not just "spectral," but also quite material and exists as part of everyday life for the civilians, workers, and military personnel who encounter these spaces.<sup>145</sup> As Eleana Kim writes, the military hardware left behind in the aftermath of the Korean War in the DMZ and within the CCZ continues to affect those who come into contact with them: "Comprehensive government statistics on landmine casualties do not exist, but estimates by the PSA count 1,000 civilian casualties, and 2,000 to 3,000 military casualties."<sup>146</sup> Furthermore,

Few South Koreans are aware of the existence of mines in so-called rear areas, south of the DMZ, where, by South Korean government estimates, there are 1,100 "planned" mine fields (meaning laid by the South Korean military, and therefore documented) and 208 "unconfirmed ones." According to the expert deminer Kim Kiho, when U.S. forces were drawn down in the 1970s, they left behind as many as 200,000 mines, the locations, types, and numbers of which were never shared with the South Korean military.<sup>147</sup>

If one were to count the casualties due to the residual leftovers of the Korean War conflict as part of the official war casualties, it would be difficult to argue that the "end" of the Cold War (and Korean War) is solely "spectral," as the realities of living and working in or within close proximity to the DMZ and CCZ comes along with material risks and consequences. A way to work through the material legacies of the Korean War with the temporal legacies of the Cold War is Ann Laura Stoler's concept of ruins:

This is not a turn to ruins as memorialized monumental "leftovers" or relics – although these come into our purview as well – but rather to what people are *left with*: to what remains blocking livelihoods and health, to the aftershocks of

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid, 33.

<sup>145</sup> For more on interactions between military hardware and civilians in the DMZ, see Eleana Kim's article on the agency of mines. Eleana J. Kim, "Toward an Anthropology of Landmines: Rogue Infrastructure and Military Waste in the Korean DMZ," *Cultural Anthropology* 31.2 (2016): 162-187.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid, 169.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid, 168-169.



imperial assault, to the social afterlife of structures, sensibilities, and things. Such effects reside in the corroded hollows of landscapes, in the gutted infrastructures of segregated cityscapes and in the microecologies of matter and mind....The question is pointed: how do imperial formations persist in their material debris, in ruined landscapes and through the social ruination of people's lives?<sup>148</sup>

Despite the focus of the collected volume on the legacies of colonialism and imperialism, the questions raised speak to Cold War legacies as well, and points to this chapter's reading of not only the material remains of these Cold War formations, but also the subjectivity of lived experience in the "post"-Cold War period as well.

Furthermore, Kuan-Hsing Chen writes of the "affective intensities" that occur in people-to-people relationships during the Cold War, such as the reunion of divided families in both Taiwan (with China) and South Korea (with North Korea). In his chapter "De-Cold War: The Im/possibility of 'Great Reconciliation,'" he emphasizes that in the context of North Korea and South Korea, and China and Taiwan, national histories and familial histories inextricably intersect: "For subjects encountering these experiences, the emotional plane of affective desire seems to be the most prominent, overshadowing all other aspects of the reunions. Nor does it matter if the bodily experience (*tiyan*) of the event is real or imaginary. These moments of intensity are an ineradicable part of subject formation."<sup>149</sup> In other words, Chen brings the question of subjectivity into the forefront of the study of the Cold War and its effects in the present.

He emphasizes that these "affective intensities" challenge the notion of the Cold War as "over"; furthermore, these "affective intensities" are essential to what Kwon describes as the "locally specific" Cold War:

The effects of the cold war have been embedded in local history, and simply pronouncing the war to be over will not cause them to dissolve. The complex effects of the war, mediated through our bodies, have been inscribed into our national, family, and personal histories. In short, the cold war is still alive within us.<sup>150</sup>

This statement has particular resonance for diasporic subjects and for cultural productions that are intended to address subjectivity and the traumas of the Cold War and Korean War. Chen's other critical intervention within this "new" Cold War studies is his concept of "de-cold war." To begin the process of "de-cold war," Chen argues for the necessity to "mark out a space in which unspoken stories and histories may be told, and to recognize and map this historically constituted cultural and political effects of the cold war."<sup>151</sup> This text helps to further disentangle the epistemological structures of the Cold War and the productive power of "affective

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<sup>148</sup> Ann Laura Stoler, ed., *Imperial Debris: On Ruins and Ruination* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013): 9-10.

<sup>149</sup> Kuan-Hsing Chen, *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010): 118.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid, 120.

intensities” and the working through of these intensities through cultural productions in order to “de-cold war,” or to “de-Korean War” by extension.

Jodi Kim further examines Cold War “ends,” which she identifies in multiple ways; however, I focus on her conceptualization of Cold War “ends” as “fragments and remnants, whether the physical remains and ruins of Cold War violence....the human ruin or death produced by such violence, or the necessarily fragmentary attempts to grasp, remember, and narrate Cold War history.”<sup>152</sup> This type of “end” seems to be similar to Kwon’s theory of Cold War “decompositions” and Stoler’s concept of “ruins” and “ruination,” as well as speaks to the inability to completely craft a coherent narrative of the Cold War through contemporary cultural productions, operation through the logics of memory and memorialization. Critical Asian American memorial studies as methodology, in looking at the subjectivity of Cold War material and temporal remains, can also provide a framework for analyzing the art projects of the REAL DMZ PROJECT and Minouk Lim’s *Navigation ID*. Furthermore, both of these art projects utilize different genres – from performance to the tour to film to encounters between people, “affective intensities” not from divided families as mentioned in Chen’s text but divided temporalities that are brought together through the public square or through the security tourism circuit.

### The REAL DMZ PROJECT

The REAL DMZ PROJECT (hereafter: RDP) began its annual exhibitions in 2012, based off of academic research conducted on the DMZ, engaging scholarship, art, and the sites of the Civilian Control Zone (CCZ) bordering the Civilian Control Line (CCL) in Cheorwon County, Gangwon-do, South Korea. In the 2014 iteration of the project, the exhibition and tour of the work began at the Art Sonje Center in Seoul, featuring various books and art installations, and then followed a tour course. The stops on the tour include the tour bus, Yangji-ri Village (a propaganda village and site of the RDP’s artists’ residency program), the Cheorwon Peace Observatory, Woljeong-ri Station (an abandoned train station that is the northernmost stop in South Korea and used to connect directly to North Korea), the DMZ Peace & Cultural Square, the DMZ Peace & Cultural Hall, and Soi Mountain.

The mission of the project is to “investigate the paradoxical conditions of conflict while imagining a new, alternative reality for the Demilitarized Zone.”<sup>153</sup> Furthermore, the project “strives to give voice to the historical, political, and social strife that has resulted from the political division” and “sheds light on the ruptured and distorted narratives, the forgotten or erased stories.”<sup>154</sup> The format of the RDP, which follows along similar sites of the security tourism circuit,<sup>155</sup> instead takes tourists to these same locations but focuses on the various art exhibitions that provide critical interpretations of the Korean War and its legacies. These works allow for

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<sup>152</sup> Jodi Kim, *Ends of Empire: Asian American Critique and the Cold War* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010): 4.

<sup>153</sup> Exhibition Program for the REAL DMZ PROJECT 2014.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Cheorwon, as well as other cities located along the DMZ, is renowned for its security tourism, which draws not only foreign tourists but also South Koreans as well. For historical contextualization and analysis of the security tourism see Jeffrey A. Tripp, *Contentious divide: The cultural politics of the Korean demilitarized zone, 1953-2008* (PhD diss.: University of Hawai’i, Manoa, 2010).

more open and oppositional readings of the memory of the war and division beyond official memorialization discourse, as found in the various memorials located at the sites of the tour.

For example, one of the last stops of the RDP tour is the DMZ Peace and Cultural Square, which consists of an exhibition hall that featured several of the art projects from the REAL DMZ PROJECT. One of the exhibits within the museum hall is titled “We Want to Be Back on Track,” referencing the disconnected railway line at Woljeong-ri that used to connect North Korea and South Korea. There was an ardent wish for peace and a desire for reunification, and dioramas featuring reproductions of the DMZ and the CCL, as if in anticipation for a future in which those borders would no longer exist.

Outside of the Peace and Cultural Center and sitting across the plaza is a large white cenotaph with the phrase “Memorial Stone to the Dead Generals and Soldiers of the Korean War Iron Triangle Battle.” The memorial itself is not that striking, but the rhetoric in the plaques surrounding the cenotaph was in stark contrast to not only the aims of the RDP, but also to the DMZ Peace and Cultural Square. One plaque reads in large letters: “The Korean War is the victory war fighting by the people all over the Republic of Korea. [sic]” An adjacent plaque reads: “The Korean War (1950-1953) is the war blocking the invasion of the communist and taking victory of the liberal democracy. If we forget the Korean War, that kind of war would be break out again in the near future. Let us protect our country together with all our strength. [sic]” The Korean in the Peace Plaza is referred to as a “victory war,” a “war block the invasion of the communism,” and “taking victory of the liberal democracy.” The memorial’s one-dimensional representation of the war and its official state-sanctioned reading of the memory of the Korean War seems to be in direct contrast with the aims of the RDP, which aims to provide more complicated understandings of the Korean War.

However, it is these very moments of slippage that demonstrate precisely how Korean War temporality, and Cold War temporality, is more complicated than “decomposition” or “recursive” temporalities. These overlapping narratives and memory works – peace museum, war memorial, critical remembering<sup>156</sup> that is practiced by the RDP, and the visitors’ own subjectivities – combine to form palimpsestic temporalities that exceed any one notion of time. At the public space of the DMZ and by its very contested nature of memory, erasures, and forgettings, time is neither linear nor circular, not decomposing nor occurring in circular motions.

Despite the existence of all of these types of temporalities simultaneously working with and against one another, the RDP does not explicitly illuminate these contradictions. Rather, by adding to the memorial landscape, the RDP becomes another type of competing memorial project. However, the RDP functions as a framework by which visitors can begin to deconstruct the existing memorial legacies of the DMZ on their own terms and the public square, as well as individual artists’ utilizing of public space becomes the means by which these contestations unfold. To this extent, I examine four of the RDP artists and their usage of public space within their artworks.

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<sup>156</sup> See Crystal Mun-hye Baik, “Unfaithful Returns: Reiterations of Dissent, U.S.-Korean Militarized Debt, and the Architecture of Violent Freedom,” *Journal of Asian American Studies* 18.1 (February 2015): 41-72.

*The Politics of Sound and Space:*

*Florian Hecker (born in 1975, Germany) – Reformulation, 2014, three-channel electroacoustic sound, loudspeaker system, 23min 7sec*<sup>157</sup>

Florian Hecker's "room-specific" sound piece is exhibited in the community air-raid shelter at Yangji-ri, built for the purposes of keeping the villagers safe in the case of an attack by North Korea. As a community located on the border of the DMZ, these community spaces were necessary. Yet, before the RDP's usage of the space as an exhibition space, according to the tour guide, it had been used as a community gym. All of the equipment had been moved out, however, at the artist's request.

The sounds that come from the speakers hanging around the walls of the room were disjointed, jarring, and unpleasant.<sup>158</sup> The room, due to its emptiness, amplified the sounds and many participants on the tour, including myself, were visibly uncomfortable by being in the room, especially when the heavy door was closed, creating a claustrophobic environment. The sound was everywhere, unavoidable.

The walls, however, retained the original intentions of the community space as air-raid shelter as numerous posters demonstrated in elaborate detail the procedures to take in the case of a nuclear attack. The room's intended purpose as shelter speaks not only to the enduring legacies of the war, but also to the everyday realities of living in a space in close proximity to the futurity of possible war. That the artist removed the exercise equipment that allotted the communal transformation of this space from site of war to site of everyday living underscores this point further.

Furthermore, in the program notes, the usage of sound is given a particular rationale: "As the DMZ is a territory marked by invisible tension, oppression, and paranoia, Hecker's approach is likewise non-visual."<sup>159</sup> That much of the presence of militarization on the Korean peninsula relies on invisibility or the masking of militarized technologies speaks to a necessarily non-visual means of representing the inherent contradictions in the space. However, while the usage of sound and the experience of moving through the air-raid shelter with other people allow for alternate possibilities for imagining the militarized spaces of impending future war, there also still appear to be unresolved contestations between artistic usage of the space and community ownership – why is it that the villagers needed to give up their communal space for the sake of the RDP? Nevertheless, opening up the possibilities for the non-visual, represented through sound, space, and bodies as they interact with and among the sound waves, draws attention to other invisible forms and circuits of militarization.

*To Move Across 360 Degrees:*

*Tomas Saraceno (born in 1973, Argentina) – DOF (Degrees of Freedom), 2014, custom-made binocular*

Tomas Saraceno's work is exhibited in the Cheorwon Peace Observatory, a museum and exhibition space that is a popular destination for Cheorwon's security

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<sup>157</sup> Program Notes.

<sup>158</sup> I was unable to obtain recording of the sound, but these are examples that correspond closely to the sounds playing at the REAL DMZ PROJECT:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VNgVAXG91VM>.

<sup>159</sup> Program Notes.

tourism. Most notably, the Peace Observatory features binoculars for curious tourists to look at and into North Korea. Despite the focus on visibility that form much of the draw for this space, we were told repeatedly by the staff to not take photographs, particularly in the direction of North Korea. This rule was strictly enforced.

Saraceno's piece draws attention to the contradictions inherent at the site and the power relations at play in the control over visibility. What exactly are the objects that are to be "observed" at this observatory, if not the desire to look at the forbidden spaces of the DMZ and North Korea? Visibility is tied to power and to knowledge, of making legible the unknown. As Nicholas Mirzoeff argues, "visibility sutures authority to power and renders this association 'natural.'"<sup>160</sup> After all, despite the naming of the space as the "peace observatory," what is most appealing to the tourist gaze is the attempt to either observe overt displays of militarization or the glimpse of what a "real" North Korean person might look like. This focus on visibility and visibility reaches an apex in the largest space within the observatory, which is a room facing towards North Korea. The side of the room facing North Korea consists entirely of windows with various binoculars (which work with coins, emphasizing the economy of visibility) while the opposite side of the room consists of chairs resembling that of a theater. Here, North Korea becomes stage either for comfortable observation in the chairs or in close-up through the binoculars.

Saraceno's art piece specifically is to subvert the one-dimensional authority of vision, represented through the limited mobility of the binoculars, which are confined to perhaps 90 degrees of movement. The piece manipulates the standard binocular by freeing its movements; Saraceno's binocular can rotate an entire 360 degrees as well as can pivot in any direction. Furthermore, unlike the other binoculars that function on coins, Saraceno's binocular is free to use. Despite the "degrees of freedom" allowed by the binoculars, most people on the RDP tour still used the binoculars to look out into North Korea. However, taking advantage of the full mobility of the binoculars leads to a rather disappointing view: the seats of the auditorium and the people sitting in them remain out of focus due to their close proximity to the lens. Yet, the freedom of movement speaks also to the cinematic techniques used in the South Korean film *Joint Security Area* (Park Chan-wook, 2000); the 360-degree camera spin used in the film establishes a unique form of identification with the characters. Saraceno's binoculars, which opens up "perspective to the air space above and to the widely varied species of birds and insects in the area, naturally, unrestricted by borders, fences, and land mines"<sup>161</sup> also gives spectators a different way of engaging with the DMZ, opening up alternate possibilities and utilizing and imagining the space of the DMZ in an otherwise restricted area.

#### *Overlapping Temporalities in Space:*

*Jae Eun Choi (born in 1953, Korea) – No Borders Exist in Nature, 2014, neon wall text and sound installation, dimensions variable*

Jae Eun Choi's installation also follows along the security tourism course, located in a small hut inside the Woljeong-ri Station complex. The train tracks at this

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<sup>160</sup> Nicolas Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look: A Counterhistory of Visibility* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011): 6.

<sup>161</sup> Program Notes.

station used to connect the Korean peninsula; however, after the division of the peninsula and the Korean War, the train station fell into disuse after being destroyed by bombs. It is the last stop before heading to North Korea and is also the last stop on the special “DMZ Train” that leaves from Seoul Station. The station was constructed in 1914 by the Japanese, and remains a symbol for the continual division of the Korean peninsula and the desire for unification.

The installation features a neon sign that reads “No Borders Exist in Nature,” as well as a sound piece based off of the artist’s documentary on the DMZ, which features “an UN peacekeeper explaining the DMZ and the state of division at Panmunjom.”<sup>162</sup> Choi draws attention to the multiple temporalities reflected in the state of the train station through the usage of the past – the sound of the disembodied voice – and the present – the neon hum of the sign.

The sign draws attention to the artificiality of the DMZ as arbitrary division of the Korean peninsula, reflected in the use of the neon sign, as neon is often associated with artifice. Yet, these borders have real repercussions. However, despite the stalled temporality of the train station, Choi also draws attention to the fact that time is not static for nature. The exhibition booklet includes a poem with the same title:

No Borders Exist in Nature

The Panmunjeom borderline is made of thick concrete.  
Now cracked and ruined, it no longer resembles a border.  
Yellow dandelions stick their heads out through the cracks.  
Ants are busy, crossing the border, back and forth.

The dandelions mock the border  
And the sorrowful division and the social mechanism created by human society.

The ants know.  
Just how many beings of this universe are looking at the same stars.

The cranes flying over Woljeong-ri Station are gazing.  
At the last abandoned trains lying there like beasts.  
And the 1,120,00 [sic] mines left in the barbed fences.<sup>163</sup>

The poem calls attention to the eroding power of nature in breaking down barriers set up by “the ‘closedness’ [sic] of human society.”<sup>164</sup> While the poem does romanticize nature, there is value in studying the ways in which border crossings take on different meanings if agency is granted to non-material objects or animals.<sup>165</sup> These multiple ways of engaging with the space of the stalled train station, taking into account site,

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Anthropologist Elena Kim’s forthcoming book project explores DMZ border crossings and everyday interactions between humans, animals, and non-material objects like landmines. For a book focused on human border-crossing, see Suk-Young Kim’s *DMZ Crossing: Performing Emotional Citizenship Along the Korean Border* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

sight, sound, and poetry point to alternate readings of the DMZ besides as a space solely of stalled temporality and stalled movement.

*Imagining the Future:*

*Koo Jeong A (born in 1967, Korea) – Dearest Young Hoi, stainless steel table, matte definition top with black enamel painted legs, 200 x 74 x 74cm, wall drawing sticker from Steady Zero, 84.1 x 118.0cm*

The last segment of the RDP tour takes place on Soi Mountain, a site of past Korean War battles along the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel, as well as a point for strategic military bunkers used by the U.S. The piece, *Dearest Young Hoi*, takes over one of the abandoned military bunkers and explicitly imagines its future usage. Young Hoi is a fictional creation by Koo, an imagined persona who will inhabit this space. Young Hoi “was born before WWII, experienced the Korean War and lived through the digital age”<sup>166</sup> and is a writer undertaking a residency in this space, analogous to the actual artist residencies offered by the RDP. The artist imagines the military bunker as a space of creation, intended for “all future writers-in-residence of a ‘post-bunker’ united Korea.”<sup>167</sup> As the last stop of the tour, the space offers up a real usage for an imagined future time – a time not of impending war and destruction as in the air-raid shelter mentioned above, but of a time in which the bunker (and militarized objects) itself becomes obsolete, used for the creation of cultural productions.

The colliding temporalities and themes within the security tourism space of Cheorwon and neighboring villages speak to the contested nature of interpreting the division and the legacies of the Korean War. Cultural and artistic productions provide multiple ways of challenging, subverting, and imagining future intended usage of sites. Stepping out of the bunker and looking out into the beautiful landscape, all the way to North Korea (this time, with no staff members to prevent photography), it is not difficult to imagine the productive possibilities of continual creativity that pushes at the bounds of Cold War decompositions.

The next section of the chapter turns to artistic productions by Minouk Lim for the 2014 Gwangju Biennale to look more closely at relations between trauma, art, and performance. Unlike the hopeful, optimistic, and open-ended conclusion of the REAL DMZ PROJECT tour, Minouk Lim’s *Navigation ID* points to the realities of living with state-sanctioned massacres or “politicide”<sup>168</sup> and the institutionalized forgetting of these massacres. This project speaks to a different imagining of the Korean War and its lingering afterlives – it images the meeting between different victim groups, calling for a horizontal reading of the Korean War and a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which the war brushes up against differential forms of mass violence and authoritarian government rule in South Korea.

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<sup>166</sup> Program Notes.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Brendan Wright, “Politicial Violence and the Problematics of Localized Memory at Civilian Massacre Sites: The Cheju 4.3 Peace Park and the Koch’ang Incident Memorial Park,” *Cross-Currents* 4.1: (De)Memorializing the Korean War: A Critical Intervention (May 2015): 151-180.

Minouk Lim's *Navigation ID* (hereafter *NID*) was the opening piece for the 10<sup>th</sup> Gwangju Biennale (the theme: "Burning Down the House"), located in the South Jeolla Province of South Korea. The Gwangju Biennale is one of the largest and most prestigious art exhibitions in the world and is billed as "Asia's oldest biennial of contemporary art."<sup>169</sup> Reflecting the spirit of the city's history of activism, the Gwangju Biennale was "founded in 1995 in memory of spirits of civil uprising of the 1980 repression of the Gwangju Democratization Movement."<sup>170</sup>

Minouk Lim's *NID* is a powerful video, performance, and art piece that tracks two shipping containers filled with the remains of Bodo League massacre victims on their journey from individual family graves to the Gwangju Biennale space. The surviving family members of the massacres were then greeted by mothers of victims of the Gwangju Massacre in a public ceremony at the opening of the Biennale.<sup>171</sup> The shipping containers were then left at the site of the Biennale for the remainder of the exhibition.

*NID* also consists of several other exhibition pieces in the Gwangju Biennale space. In addition to *NID*, on display were also *NID – From X to A* and *NID – Hole-in-Chest Nation* in conjunction with Mr. Eui Jin Chai's *Mr. Eui Jin Chai and 1,000 canes*. *NID – From X to A* is a 2-channel video installation that shows the process of retrieval and transport of the remains as well as the meeting between the Korean War massacre victims and the mothers of the Gwangju Massacre victims.<sup>172</sup> *NID – Hole-in-Chest Nation* consists of various sculptures resembling bone, metal, and wood (inspired by Mr. Eui Jin Chai's canes), and a black *t'aegukki*, South Korea's national flag. The canes, on the other hand, are creations from Mr. Eui Jin Chai, who is a survivor of a civilian massacre. According to the exhibition plaque, he "miraculously survived a massacre that took place on December 24, 1949, when he was left for dead under the corpses of his older brother and younger cousin" and "for the past three decades, he has been making sculpture in response to 'a bitter struggle against a life tainted with sorrow, anger, solitude, and curse,' using the branches and roots of trees that he has collected."<sup>173</sup>

<sup>169</sup> From the website: <http://www.biennialfoundation.org/biennials/gwangju-biennale/>.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid. The Gwangju Democratization Movement, also known as the "Gwangju Uprising" or the "Gwangju Massacre," was a state-sanctioned (and some argue that it was U.S.-approved) suppression and massacre of civilian and student protestors who demonstrated against the military dictatorship and martial law of Chun Doo-hwan (the fifth President of South Korea from 1980 – 1988) from May 18 – 27, 1980. Student protestors from Jeonnam University (eventually joined by civilians and other uprisings in other cities) called for the end of martial law, a transition to democracy, and the end of military authoritarian rule after the assassination of President Park Chung-hee in 1979. See Kim Jŏnghān, *1980 taejung pokkiŭi minjujuŭi* (Seoul: Kita, 2013).

<sup>171</sup> The trailer for *Navigation ID* can be found on Minouk Lim's website: <http://www.minouklim.com/index.php?/navigation-id---331-trailer/>.

<sup>172</sup> The trailer for *Navigation ID – From X to A* can be found on Minouk Lim's website: <http://www.minouklim.com/index.php?/from-x-to-a-327-trailer/>.

<sup>173</sup> See images from the exhibition on Minouk Lim's website: <http://www.minouklim.com/index.php?/the-hole-in-chest-nation/>.



Like the art exhibitions from the RDP, Lim's main *NID* exhibit takes place in the public square, confronting visitors with its presence. The bones are not noticeable until the viewer looks through the windows of the shipping container, yet the bones and presence of the dead still take a notable hold on the area. Here lies the intersections of multiple temporalities as well: the invisible presence of the unresolved Korean War, the visible evidence and existence of victims of mass violence who were not only branded as enemies due to their association with the Cold War category of "communists" or "Reds," but also their memory of this event – as well as commemorations and memorialization – was actively suppressed by the South Korean state until the 1990s, alongside the experience of more contemporary mass state violence inflicted on the students and citizens of Gwangju. These bones are literally decomposing bodies, but their memory/memorialization is not decomposition in terms of Heonik Kwon's argument about Cold War temporality. The family members, brought together by an affective genealogy of suffering and state violence, by their very presence and by the bones that are now unearthed and left in the open for witnessing, stand testament to what Chen Kuan-Hsing writes as the cold war that "still lives within us" and that has never left.

*NID*, taken as a whole, is a powerful and moving experience and in addition to being a work of art, particularly stands out for its usage of concrete evidence of trauma, unearthing knowledge that has been buried by the state or remained privatized. In contrast to the more conventional artistic materials found within the rest of the biennale, *NID* is unique for its incorporation of actual human remains and in bringing together surviving family members of victims from different generations of state violence. These familial interactions – the Gwangju mothers and the descendants of the Korean War massacres – form a new genealogy brought together by state violence and "politicide." By looking into the shipping containers, viewers become direct witness to these mass atrocities rather than mere spectators moving through museum space, viewing photographs and archival documents of death, or watching the imagined aliveness of those bodies before they are killed (again) in films.

This chapter works through two disparate yet similar projects that attempt to grapple with the legacy and trauma of the Korean War through art: the 2014 reiteration of the REAL DMZ PROJECT and Minouk Lim's *Navigation ID* at the 2014 Gwangju Biennale. Both projects blur the lines between traditional museum/art exhibitions and performance art, congregating in various forms of public space, especially the public square. Furthermore, two squares resonate with me as a visitor to these exhibits – one left open with possibility yet with a memorial that forecloses anything but dominant meanings (DMZ Peace and Cultural Square) and one that hides in plain sight evidence of state violence (Gwangju Biennale Square). These layers point to the complicated nature of Korean War memory and memorialization and the need for a referential understanding of trauma to supplement historical boundaries of temporality.

These projects allow for the communication of trauma by visual and performance artists affected by Korean division as well as by families of victims whose voices are often not accounted for in traditional museum spaces and historical narratives. Furthermore, these projects read across time and space by bringing together multiple temporalities in site-specific locales. The RDP calls attention to the continued effects of militarization (often hidden away from day-to-day life yet enormously present in the lives of those living in the border areas) and Cold War

realities in the spaces in close proximity to the DMZ while bringing tourists along who may otherwise be unaware of the histories and legacies of the Korean War. Mirroring popular security tourism trails, which remain a main draw for people of all nationalities to tour the areas around the DMZ, the RDP attempts to showcase alternative usages and understandings of the DMZ and the CCL beyond that of securitization, militarism, and North Korean threat.

Minouk Lim's *Navigation ID* reads the historical events of the Bodo League Massacre that occurred in the summer of 1950 around the official beginning of the Korean War (June 25, 1950) with that of the Gwangju Massacre thirty years later (May 1980). In the contemporary space of the Gwangju Biennale, multiple victim groups and bereaved citizens encounter one another as well as tourists who come specifically for the draw of the Biennale without necessarily directly encountering Gwangju's memorial landscape. While the dissertation as a whole examines alternate narratives and epistemologies of the Korean War, this chapter studies forms of knowledge production that itself are alternate to dominant forms of memorial, museum, and film discourse. These cultural productions complicate theories of Cold War temporalities and demonstrate how these temporalities look different from the perspective of the lived experience of survivors and descendants of mass state violence in South Korea. The last chapter and conclusion of the dissertation extends this line of inquiry to examine future temporalities of the Korean War and imaginations of reconciliation and reunification through memorial form.

## Chapter 5

### Memorializing the Future: Rethinking Temporality of the Korean War through Reunification Memorials in South Korea

At Imjingak Pyeonghwa Nuri, a memorial park, there is a memorial statue dedicated to the song “30 Years Lost,” the theme song for the KBS television program “Finding Dispersed Families,” which brought the issue of separated families to public light and allowed for those without resources to air their stories publicly and seek to reunite with lost family members, mostly from the Korean War era. The television archives are now part of UNESCO’s Memory of the World Register, inducted in 2015. The program itself ran from June 30, 1983 – November 14, 1983, and had a last impact on popular culture memory of Korean War and Cold War division of families, and resulted in 100,952 applicants for reunion of which “53,536 cases were broadcast, resulting in 10,189 reunions.”<sup>174</sup> The memorial features the lyrics on a plaque inserted into a stone cenotaph, with figures of a man and woman holding hands carved into the stone portion above it, and stands just a short distance away from “Freedom Bridge,” where the exchange of POWs took place during the signing of the Korean War Armistice Agreement in 1953. The memorial park, which functions also as a popular tourist destination, stands as a memorial to the Korean War, but also to the wish for reunification, an event that has yet to come as the Korean peninsula remains divided into two countries since the initial division of the country in 1948. Anticipating future reunification, Imjingak Pyeonghwa Nuri Park also “deliver[s] a message of peace to the international community and raise[s] public awareness of the importance of peace.”<sup>175</sup> The memorial park, with a bridge that is closed, trains that are not currently running, and a song lamenting time lost through familial separation (a visitor can continuously play the song on a loop by pressing a button) stands as a unique form of memorial that exists both to memorialize past events, but also anticipates future events that have yet to come.

Previous chapters in the dissertation have explored cinematic and built memorialization of the Korean War, with attention to the temporalities of the Korean War. This chapter explores how themes of temporality and memorialization of the Korean War appears in memorial spaces dedicated to the theme of reunification. While memorials are generally dedicated to past events and figures, as a signifier of remembering the past, the memorials that I focus on in this chapter are dedicated to an event that has yet to come – Korean reunification. What does it mean to memorialize an event that has yet to pass? Focusing on reunification memorials at two South Korean memorial complexes, the War Memorial of Korea in Yongsan, Seoul, and the Independence Hall of Korea in Cheonan, this chapter explores the various iconography of memorials used to signify division and reunification, and reflects on the temporality of the Korean War and Cold War under continual division.

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<sup>174</sup> Cultural Heritage Administration, Republic of Korea, “Nomination Form International Memory of the World Register: The Archives of the KBS Special Live Broadcast ‘Finding Dispersed Families’” (2014): 1. Accessed here:

[http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/mow/nomination\\_forms/korea\\_dispersed\\_persons\\_eng.pdf](http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/mow/nomination_forms/korea_dispersed_persons_eng.pdf).

<sup>175</sup> Exhibit plaque.

### **Imaginary Future Memorials: War Memorial of Korea and Independence Hall of Korea in 2009: *Lost Memories* (Lee Si-myung, 2002)**

*2009: Lost Memories* (Lee Si-myung, 2002), discussed in an earlier chapter, is a science-fiction blockbuster film co-produced by both South Korean and Japanese companies, coinciding with the 2002 FIFA World Cup, and features in its leading roles two popular actors from South Korea and Japan, Jang Dong-gun and Toru Nakamura. The film is set in the near future (at the time of release) of 2009, and takes place in an alternate history Seoul in which Japanese colonization had never ended. The series of events that led to this alternate history began with the failed assassination of Ito Hirobumi by An Jung-geun in 1909 (An was successful in reality). The film later reveals that a Japanese special agent traveled back in time to stop the assassination, resulting in a newly created storyline and history. In this storyline, the March 1<sup>st</sup> movement of 1919 is suppressed, the US and Japan ally with each other during WWII, and the atomic bomb is ultimately dropped on Berlin in 1945 instead of on Hiroshima and Nagasaki (preventing the U.S. from dropping the atomic bomb on Japan is the primary motivation for the time travelers to change history). As discussed in a previous chapter, although it is not explicitly spelled out in this film, in the alternate timeline the Korean War never occurs because the peninsula was never divided by the Soviet Union and the U.S. because Korea had never achieved independence.

The absence of the Korean War is the entry point through which I examine the representation of museums within this film. Specifically, I focus on the two museums that show up in *2009: Lost Memories* – the War Memorial of Korea and the Independence Hall of Korea – in order to draw out larger parallels between the role of museums in public space and how they reflect alternate histories and temporalities. Additionally, I also return to the “problem of the Korean War” in representation that I addressed in previous chapters, focusing specifically on how this “problem” manifests within representations of museums in this film.

Even before the representations of museums, the film establishes the setting of 2009 colonized Seoul (or Keijo as the city is addressed in the film) through the showcasing of famous landmarks and memorials associated with the city and how these public spaces have changed in the different timeline. Most notably, the familiar glow of neon or bright Korean signs and city screens are now replaced with Japanese characters. After establishing shots of the Seoul city streets, the film then depicts Gwanghwamun Square, with notable changes from the familiar public square in the present.

Within alternate timeline Seoul, the public space of the city itself has now changed (or remained the same, as in the case of the Japanese Colonial Government-General Building). Instead of the statues of Admiral Yi Sun-shin and King Sejong, Gwanghwamun Square now features Toyotomi Hideyoshi, who led the first attacks against the Korean peninsula in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century (leading to a defeat by Yi Sun-sin)<sup>176</sup>. Behind this statue, the specter of the still-standing Government General-

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<sup>176</sup> Yi Sun-sin is perhaps arguably South Korea’s most recognizable national hero. John Lie includes a short interlude in his book on Korean pop music on Korean national heroes. See John Lie, *K-Pop: Popular Music, Culture Amnesia, and Economic Innovation in South Korea* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014). Dramatization of the Battle of Myeongyang can be seen in the recent blockbuster film *The Admiral: Roaring Currents*

Building looms (the camera first focuses on the statue of Hideyoshi and then fades out to focus on the background structure). Historically, the building was demolished in 1995, the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of Japanese colonialism in Korea. Despite these public memorials not being a central focus of this chapter, I introduce them because of the film's utilization of the changes in Seoul public space in establishing shots to demonstrate how museums, memorials, and public space are utilized for ideological purposes and expressions of power. Public space and nationalism are inherently interconnected and memorials and museums, as well as their claims over memory, are always political.<sup>177</sup> The difference between the current Gwanghwamun Square and the cinematic Gwanghwamun Square in *2009: Lost Memories* demonstrates starkly how public space reflects the differing ideologies of the states in power.

With the attention to public space and power from the beginning of the film with its establishing shots, I turn to the film's representations of exhibition space, specifically the War Memorial of Korea in Yongsan, Seoul and the Independence Hall of Korea in Cheonan. The first of these museum spaces, the War Memorial of Korea, shows up in the film within the alternate timeline. However, it is no longer called the War Memorial of Korea; rather, this museum complex is now the Japanese Cultural Center and is the site of an exhibition hosted by the fictional Inoue Foundation, which includes displays of artifacts collected from throughout Asia.<sup>178</sup> It is later revealed that the Inoue who established the foundation was the person who originally traveled back in time to assassinate An Jung-geun, thus setting into motion the alternate timeline of the film.

The site of the War Memorial, or the Japanese Cultural Center, is significant because on display is an artifact called the "Lunar Soul," which is an ancient Korean agricultural tool that also turns out to be the key to reopening the gate of time, which would allow for the Korean independence movement (or terrorist group as classified by the Japanese authorities) – the Hureisenjin – to go back into the past and to restore the original historical timeline. My main question, however, is: how does a structure like the War Memorial of Korea exist in this new timeline? There is no attempt to mask the War Memorial of Korea as a different institution; its exterior and interior look exactly the same, albeit decorated a little differently and with different exhibition materials, and the central plaza is most notably missing Admiral Yi Sun-sin's turtle ships. Yet, most viewers who are familiar with the museum would recognize it immediately. But what allows for the War Memorial of Korea to exist in this alternate timeline, particularly since the museum was constructed specifically to convey the history of the Korean War (as well as Korean military history and patriotism), a war that never happened in the alternate history portrayed within this film?

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(Kim Han-min, 2014), which is the current top-grossing and most-watched film in South Korean film history.

<sup>177</sup> For an analysis of public space and power in Korea during the Japanese colonial era, see Todd A. Henry, *Assimilating Seoul: Japanese Rule and the Politics of Public Space in Colonial Korea, 1910-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014). See also Hong Kal, *Aesthetic Constructions of Korean Nationalism: Spectacle, Politics and History* (London: Routledge, 2011).

<sup>178</sup> For more on politics of collection and exhibition display in Japan see Noriko Aso, *Public Properties: Museums in Imperial Japan* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), especially Chapter 3 "Colonial Properties."

The uncanny overlapping of differing temporalities rewrites the War Memorial space, intended to convey Korean patriotism, into an exhibition space that consolidates the Japanese imperial gaze in colonized space through exhibitionary practice. As Youngmin Choe points out, the War Memorial of Korea/Japanese Cultural Center's staging for the first major action scene in the film can be read as a forcible reassertion of Korean sovereignty over a space that was originally intended to function as such, at least in a "correct" timeline:

Against this ahistorical vision that invokes the Korean War while denying that it ever happened, the Korean liberation group suddenly intrudes into the exhibition hall through the skylight that opens and focuses like a camera aperture. The Korean liberation group shatters the museal space and the museal gaze authorized by the Japanese, and brings back the specter of the Korean War by forcing Sakamoto [played by Jang Dong-gun] to confront his own feelings of ethnic fidelity. Entering through the cinematic eye, the intruders violently recode the very same museum space into a violent site of remembering and recollecting a different past denied outside the museum – namely, a different past of a liberated Korea by asserting their presence and resistance.<sup>179</sup>

The overlapping yet co-existing temporalities of continual Japanese colonialism and continual Korean War in separate timelines (that of the film and that of history), serve to draw further attention to the absence of the Korean War. Yet, the presence of a unified Korean group breaking into the museum space also speaks to the inability of the War Memorial of Korea to fully convey this history of unified Korean identity as the museum is marked by Cold War division culture and a patriotism that is specifically South Korean, or which makes claims on South Korean legitimacy over unified Korean culture. As Sheila Miyoshi Jager points out, the War Memorial itself makes claims to Korean independence movements and armies in an unbroken patriotic lineage that manifests itself as a natural genealogy to the current South Korean state and military power:

The heritage of the ROK Army is traced to the Righteous Army and the Independence Army, while Japan's formative role in the establishment of the South Korean military is strikingly elided. Clearly, if such a lineage had to be drawn, it was the DPRK (Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the official name of North Korea) Army, and not the ROK Army, that accumulated the vast majority of anti-Japanese Independence fighters within its ranks. The obfuscation of this fact further indicates the present-minded vantage point of the memorial: the possibility of laying claim to Korea's (anti-Japanese) patriotic past could be made only by illuminating the victorious state's ultimate triumph over its enemies – Japanese imperialism and North Korean communism – through the memorial's grandiose display of power and prosperity. It was precisely this assertion of *ultimate* victory that allowed the South Korean state

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<sup>179</sup> Youngmin Choe, "Postmemory DMZ in South Korea Cinema, 1999-2003," *Journal of Korean Studies* 18.2 (Fall 2013): 329-330.

to lay claim to Korea's patriotic tradition because North Korea (and the DPRK military) had *ultimately* failed.<sup>180</sup>

The War Memorial of Korea is a space also for a revision of Korean history that marks the Republic of Korea as the legitimate inheritor of the "martial masculinity" of the past, especially in contradistinction to the DPRK/North Korea. In the context of the film *2009: Lost Memories*, the Hureisenjin can be seen as taking back the War Memorial of Korea's exhibitionary space, asserting the strength of not just Korean sovereignty and unity regardless of national borders, but also as a reminder of South Korea's claim to this legacy through the film's utilization of the familiar space of the War Memorial of Korea.

As discussed in a previous chapter, despite the Korean War not being mentioned within the narrative, the film is still significant because an erasure of Korean War is still a method by which narratives can resolve or grapple with the "problem" of the Korean War. This comes into play more prominently as even after the resolution of the conflict in the film and a reversal of the tampering of historical timelines, the film in its corrected timeline still presents a different alternate future. This is indicated by one of the members of the Hureisenjin who explains the "proper" timeline to the protagonist: "[in] 2008, after 60 years of separation North and South Korea united to become a new nation with a strong economy and military. Korea became a new icon in Asia." The "true" timeline of history in the film does not reflect actual reality at the time of release of the film (2002), although at the height of the Sunshine Policy reunification was seen as within the realm of possibility for happening within the near future, or even now (2019) as the Korean peninsula still remains divided, despite the North Korea-South Korea joint talks under the current Moon Jae-in presidential administration. What this film presents, however, is a different future in which successful reunification is not just a promise, but also a reality.

Yet, what does this mean for the context of actually existing memorials, and what to make of reunification memorials that memorialize a future promise rather than an actual event? It is possible that the imagined future outcome is a promise that is meant to be kept, as articulated by the film that presents a united Korea "with a strong economy and military" and the "new icon in Asia." Yet, perhaps the reunification memorials can also be seen as memorialization of a failure of resolution of the Korean War, and anticipating a future in which the Korean War does not need to have existed as in the case of *2009: Lost Memories*. Part of the issue of the Korean War is that it exists as a "problem," an epistemological rupture predicated on division and Cold War ideologies that leave no room for non-alignment or neutrality, particularly on the Korean peninsula and the very real material legacies and effects of Cold War sentiments that continue to exist in the present. Furthermore, the war destabilizes narratives of Korean identity, collaboration, and independence movements within the discourse of colonial resistance, which emphasizes unified Korean spirit against Japanese oppression. The "problem of the Korean War" becomes a literal problem at museum sites in South Korea that focus on the Japanese colonial era, in which the Korean War makes virtually no appearance, including at the Independence Hall of Korea, or at the War Memorial of Korea where genealogies and

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<sup>180</sup> Sheila Miyoshi Jager, "Monumental Histories: Manliness, the Military, and the War Memorial," *Public Culture* 14.2 (2002): 399.

legacies of earlier resistance movements are subsumed into South Korean national narratives of martial manhood. It is not surprising that *2009: Lost Memories* imagines reunification within its narrative rather than the Korean War in order to avoid addressing the difficult problem of South Korean capitulation to external forces such as the U.S. in the aftermath of the Korean War. Korean sovereignty is retained at the expense of Korean War representation.

Is it possible to portray Korean reunification in a continual state of division culture outside of the realm of imagination? After all, there are reunification memorials at the War Memorial of Korea. However, the last scenes of the film *2009: Lost Memories* seem to point to the issue of South Korean sovereignty through switching perspectives to a different museum space, perhaps indicating that the War Memorial of Korea is insufficient in being the representative war memorial complex for a reunified Korea. By the end of the film, the Japanese attempt to distort history (literally) fails as the Hureisenjin, led by Sakamoto, is able to return to the past and redirect history back on its proper path. The final scene of the film takes place in 2009 – this time in the “correct” timeline. However, the film does not return to the War Memorial of Korea, the exhibition space represented at the beginning. Instead, the film ends with another museum – the Independence Hall of Korea in Cheonan, which focuses on Korea’s independence movements before and during the Japanese colonial era.

A tour guide leads a group of students through the exhibits and stops at one panel with archival photographs of independence movement participants: “These people are the ones who gave their lives to reclaim our country. Without them you wouldn’t be here.” This familiar rhetoric of debt and sacrifice, as discussed in a previous chapter, is also found at the War Memorial of Korea, in which the similar phrase used in U.S. war memorial culture is repeated throughout the exhibition: “Freedom is not free.” However, the sacrifice made on behalf of future generations in the context of the Independence Hall of Korea was done by unified/pre-division Koreans rather than soldiers from the U.S. or the UN, presenting a slightly different genealogy of gratitude than at the War Memorial of Korea. In this way, the Independence Hall of Korea, mediated by the docent, can represent a greater claim to a reunified Korean lineage than the War Memorial of Korea that presents a more explicit South Korean claim to patriotic genealogy.

While recognizing that this film focuses on the independence movements and on a continuation of Japanese colonialism, it is still significant that the film is bookended with two iconic museums – the War Memorial of Korea at the beginning of the film as a representative of Japanese colonial power and its exhibitionary gaze, and the Independence Hall of Korea at the ending of the film as a representative of the distinctly Korean gaze that celebrates its fight for sovereignty. However, why did the film not begin and end with the Independence Hall of Korea? Conversely, why did the film not begin and end with the War Memorial of Korea?

Perhaps these questions speak more to the issue of temporality and representation of Korean War in museum and memorial context. What would happen to museums that focus on the Korean War, and that are attendant to Cold War discourses of anticommunism, outside of the frameworks of Korean War and Cold War? While museum texts and spaces are subject to revision as any other cultural text, will there still be a need for an institution like the War Memorial of Korea, a museum complex that focuses on the history and legacies of war as told from a South Korean perspective, in the context of a unified Korea?



Public space and discourse serve certain ideological needs that would change along with new interpretations of history. In this sense, it is telling that the film does not end with the War Memorial of Korea in the “corrected” timeline in which unified Korea in 2009 is a reality rather than a possibility, perhaps suggesting that the War Memorial of Korea is obsolete or outdated in this temporality, as it is a space predominately focused on Cold War ideology motivated by South Korea’s relations with the U.S., which is no longer necessary in a country reunified and that is the “new icon in Asia.” The Independence Hall of Korea, with its focus on independence movements and an entire exhibition hall devoted to pre-history and Korean sovereignty is a museum complex that could potentially exist in a unified Korea, perhaps even appealing to North Korean historiography as well and bringing together the Koreas in a truly unified cause. The wish fulfillment of a unified Korea leading Asia in the film speaks to the fantasy of reunification and reconciliation that seemed to be on the cusp of reality in 2002 and could potentially have happened by 2009, but the reality is that a decade later, the reunification question and the end of the Korean War is still up in the air and division culture still remains.

### **Imaginary Future Memorials: Reunification Memorials at the War Memorial of Korea and the Independence Hall of Korea**

While both the War Memorial of Korea and the Independence Hall of Korea are represented in the film *2009: Lost Memories* as parallel exhibitionary spaces serving different purposes in parallel timelines, they exist together in the present, and both museums include reunification memorials in their exterior exhibition spaces. How do these memorials compare with one another and what iconography do they use to memorialize the promise of a future event yet to come? Furthermore, what does it mean to memorialize an anticipated future event, which also seems to be deferred or broached depending on changing political tides and presidential administrations?

At the War Memorial of Korea, there are several different reunification memorials scattered throughout the outdoor exhibition space. The most recognizable of these is the Statue of Brothers, which I discussed in the introduction. The memorial portrays two brothers – the older brother representing South Korea and the younger brother representing North Korea – in an embrace on top of a grave-shaped burial mound with a crack running down the middle. The crack also doubles as an entrance and visitors can enter inside the doom to see murals of various Korean War scenes and plaques on the floor for each of the UN member nations who participated in the war. Equating national division onto familial division, particularly the divide between brothers, is commonly used in cultural texts such as film and literature, and also makes an appearance in memorial iconography as well, particularly in figurative sculptural works. As critiqued in previous chapters the brothers’ embrace can be read as a paternalistic enfolding of North Korea into South Korea rather than of a reunification on equal terms. The figurative embrace of the brothers also speaks to the symbolic embrace of the War Memorial’s architectural structure itself with the wings of the structure functioning to embrace visitors into the museum space, bridging the gap between the public plaza representing everyday life and the reverential space of the memorial and museum complex.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Kim Ch’angsu, “T’echönjaengginyömgwan hyönsangsölgwe mit tangsönane taehan pip’yöng,” *Köñch’uk(Taehan’göñch’uk’ak’oeji)* 34.2 (1990-03): 45-46.

However, there are several other reunification memorials throughout the memorial complex with different iconography that focus on abstract themes like temporality and peace. These include the “Korea Peace Bell” and the “Clock Tower of Peace” and the “Clock of Hope for Peaceful Reunification.” The “Korea Peace Bell” was dedicated on July 27, 2014, and had the backing of the National Cultural Festival Committee for Peaceful Unification of Korea. The statue consists of a bronze bell hanging from the top of two intersecting bronze “U”- and “N”-shaped abstract structures, resembling the middle part of a chain-link. The plaque that the bell sits on is embossed with flags of UN member nations that were involved in the Korean War with the UN flag in the center of the plaque. The structure is by British designer Arnold Schwartzman, and another version of the memorial was dedicated in 2015 at the JSA in Paju. The sponsoring organization, the Korea Informational Association has plans to build more bell structures along the DMZ as well as in the capitals of the UN participating nations.<sup>182</sup> As is common for memorial complexes, oftentimes memorial sculptures, museum exhibition texts, and displays contradict one another or present competing interpretations. Reunification is no exception and here, the “Korea Peace Bell” stands out in its design as not just a non-Korean bell, but also for its bright garish color alongside the more subdued colors of the other memorial sculptures in the park. The UN-shaped sculpture and Western bell presents almost the opposite iconography of the Statue of Brothers, with the Statue of Brothers focusing on inter-Korean reconciliation (even if overtly paternalistic in regards to North Korea) and the brothers’ position on top of a Silla-style burial mound. Rather, this memorial is a UN memorial and collapses the discourse of reunification together with UN and U.S. intervention during the Korean War. In this memorial, reunification is not a Korean affair, but also a global undertaking as well (especially with the plan to replicate more memorial statues around the world), and a reminder of the sacrifice of other countries involved in the Korean War rather than of reunification on Korean terms. What does it mean for a reunification memorial, made from materials collected in the DMZ area, to literally spell out the word “UN”? In earlier chapters, I demonstrated how the memorial complex allows for competing memories and temporalities to exist in the same spatial location, yet the same can be said of the future anticipated even of reunification as well, where competing memorials already have been established despite the speculative nature of what reunification might actually look like and on whose terms it would be carried out.

The remaining reunification memorials at the War Memorial of Korea are the Clock Tower of Peace, and an accompanying Clock of Hope for Peaceful Reunification located a little further away from the tower. The tower memorial stands just beyond the Statue of Brothers on the same path, closer to the entrance to the left wing of the War Memorial. While the Statue of Brothers presents a fraternal and masculine imagery of the Korean War and division, as well as the hope for future reunification, the Clock Tower of Peace presents a more feminine image of war and peace through the portrayal of two young girls on top of a pile of military machinery including tanks, ships, and aircraft. One girl is kneeling and holds onto a clock stopped at the time of the outbreak of the Korean War on June 25<sup>th</sup>, 1950 at what appears to be 4am. The other girl is standing with her arm supporting the kneeling girl

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182

[http://www.korinf.com/contents/board/webzine/webzineView.asp?page\\_str\\_menu=23&action\\_flag=&search\\_word=&page\\_no=0&bbs\\_seq=1054&passwd=.](http://www.korinf.com/contents/board/webzine/webzineView.asp?page_str_menu=23&action_flag=&search_word=&page_no=0&bbs_seq=1054&passwd=)

and carries another clock on her shoulders marking the current time and date. The sculpture was designed by Korean artist Ahn Pil-Yun, Professor at Kyung-Gi University and was dedicated on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2002, and symbolizes the hope for Korean reunification in the future. An epigraph at the sculpture reads:

Erecting the Clock Tower  
 Symbolizing War and Peace  
 a Twin Clock Tower  
 Points to a new time of New Millennium  
 on a pile of rusty arms  
  
 Stopped clock wrecked by the Korean War  
 Here a Clock Tower is erected  
 for the day of reunification  
 again beating like the hearts of two girls

The usage of clocks to represent both war and peace together has been commonly used in memorial iconography, particularly at the Hiroshima Peace Memorial in Japan. Furthermore, the imagery of young girls and military hardware is also common particularly to emphasize the juxtaposition between innocence/peace and war. Destroyed arms and the triumph of innocence, youth, and femininity are also common iconographies used in peace memorials throughout the world. The stopping of the clock at the time of the outbreak of the Korean War points to the idea of Korean War temporality as a stalled temporality, and the gap between the present date/time since the beginning of the Korean War points to the unresolved nature of the war. Furthermore, the addition of a separate clock apart from the two already represented at the Clock Tower of Peace in a different part of the park, but part of the same path, points to the anticipation of future temporalities as well. According to the memorial plaque, the separated clock will eventually be placed on the tower as well: "Someday when Unification is realized, this Clock will be put on the Clock Tower and will indicate the Time of Unification." These memorials are themselves separated and will be reunited once the countries are unified as well. The three reunification memorials at the War Memorial of Korea – the Statue of Brothers, the Clock Tower of Peace, and the Korea Peace Bell all point to different memorial strategies in memorializing war and peace, and anticipated future reunification, making up a small part of the massive war memorial complex.

How do these reunification memorials differ from those at the Independence Hall of Korea, which was presented as perhaps the more appropriate memorial space for unified Korea in the film *2009: Lost Memories*? The Independence Hall of Korea opened on August 15<sup>th</sup>, 1987, seven years before the War Memorial of Korea, and features an incredibly large memorial park space with seven exhibition halls and numerous outdoor exhibitions. While most of the exhibition space is dedicated to the independence movements during the Japanese colonial era (1910-1945), the museum as a whole also conveys a sense of Korean ethno-nationalist pride as well, which can be found in its incorporation of elements from a national history museum, particularly in the first exhibition hall.

However, what is the connection between this museum and the Korean War? Much like *2009: Lost Memories*, this memorial hall also marginalizes the Korean War

in its historical narratives, instead focusing on Korean resistance narratives and its righteous armies and the future hope of reunification. To this extent, the museum and memorial complex is a commentary on Korean identity and nationalism. Furthermore, the first exhibition hall resembles a natural history museum in that it tells the story of the origins of the Korean people, utilizing the phrase “5,000 years of Korean history.” A plaque that is titled “The Origin of the Korean People” reads: “Over a period of 5,000 years, Korea has cultivated its remarkable cultures as one of the major nations of Northeast Asia. Since the prehistoric era, Koreans have established their unique culture on the Korean Peninsula, and have overcome many external invasions and national crises through a combination of unity and wisdom.” This narrative mirrors the War Memorial of Korea’s narrative of wars as a history of foreign invasions, although in that museum North Korea, with the backing of the PRC and USSR, is also presented as an invader. Nevertheless, at the Independence Hall of Korea, Korean ethnic identity is identified as existing for a long time and is self-evident, and a plaque that is titled “The Beginning of the Korean People” justifies the idea of an unbroken lineage of Korean ethnic heritage, until Japanese colonialism, beginning with the Prehistoric Period that “began around 700,000 years ago.” The main six museum exhibition halls (the 7<sup>th</sup> is reserved for special exhibitions) focus on the cruelties of Japanese colonization, including torture of independence activists (along with graphic dioramas and sound effects similar to Seodaemun Prison History Hall in Seoul) and the “comfort women” system, alongside celebrations of Korean martyrs who sacrificed themselves for these independence movements. The museum draws to the distant past to justify the self-evident ethnic nationalism<sup>183</sup> of Koreanness and the sovereignty that was lost during the Japanese colonial era, as well as the fight to regain sovereignty; however, is it possible for this lineage to be represented in the context of the Cold War and Korean War, and the still-divided peninsula today?

The Korean War does make an appearance in this museum, although at the end of the last exhibition hall and in only one panel. Yet, the Korean War itself destabilizes the narrative of an unbroken lineage of Korean ethno-national identity against foreign ruling powers because it is not just a Cold War conflict, but also a civil war premised on the politics of legitimacy over the direction of what Korean independence and sovereignty and the decolonizing process should look like. South Korea’s development into a subimperial power in its own right,<sup>184</sup> as well as reliance on U.S. and the presence of military bases draws question as to whether the goals of the independence movement were truly met: South Korea may be “free,” but is it “independent” or “sovereign”? This tension can be felt in the museum as well, as the Korean War section is very small and the panel description of the war is intentionally vague: “The Korean War was provoked by North Korea in its ambition to occupy and communize South Korea with the full support of the Soviet Union and communist China under the pretext of ideological war between democracy and communism on the heels of World War II.” The focus on the Korean War as “ideological war” is strategic because it erases the civil war aspect of the Korean War and by pointing out North Korea’s connections to the Soviet Union and China, there is also an implicit

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<sup>183</sup> For more on Korean ethnic nationalism see Gi-Wook Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea: Genealogy, Politics, and Legacy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006).

<sup>184</sup> Jin-kyung Lee, *Service Economies: Militarism, Sex Work, and Migrant Labor in South Korea* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

questioning of North Korea's own claim as legitimate inheritors of the spirits of the independence movement activists.

Division, in the context of this museum, is particularly difficult to represent, yet there still is a reunification memorial on the grounds of the Independence Hall of Korea complex. Located in a corner of the grounds, there is a space with a memorial dedicated not specifically to unification, but to its wish; this area is referred to as the "Garden of Yearning for Unification" (*t'ongiryŏmwŏnŭi tongsan*). The memorial structure is particularly striking as it incorporates an amphitheater-shaped structure with a bell at the underground base, as well as a towering structure that rises up into the air in a shape that almost resembles claws. The structure is made almost entirely of off-white granite, and the "claws," while appearing quite thick from the side, are quite thin when looked at directly from the ground. The memorial incorporates quite a bit of symbolism with its abstract construction and multi-level structure, and represents a convergence of heaven, earth, and humanity (*ch'ŏn, chi, in*) culminating in a wish for reunification by Korean people. The description of the memorial reads:

The Garden of Yearning for Unification was dedicated on Liberation Day (August 15) in 1995 as a monument to the wish of all Koreans for the unification of their Motherland. At the center of the Garden is an extraordinary bell which is run to express the Korean people's longing for unification. The bell is designed to simultaneously emanate sound underground, representing the land, and sound above the ground, or the heaven. The bell is styled after the typical Buddhist temple bell, 3 m in height and 8.6 ton in weight, but has an unusual feature in that it has two strikers so that it can be rung from the north and south at the same time.

The Tower of Wishes for Unification stands on six 17.1-meter-high pillars on both sides, symbolic of the heaven, earth, and humankind, thrusting into the sky in the image of a rainbow and meeting at the center. The structure above ground forms three semi-circles, signifying respectively the spaces of Peace, Freedom and Equality, which are the directions of the Korean people's aspirations. The 160-meter long stairway leading to the Tower symbolizes the path the Korean nation is destined to walk as divided it is as of yet. The clay wall in the square is open to anyone who wishes to engrave his or her words of wishes for national unification.

What is significant about this memorial structure is that it avoids mention of "North Korea" and "South Korea" and retains an abstract quality that leaves room for interpretation unlike the more figurative reunification memorials at the War Memorial of Korea. In fact, the unification that is referred to in the text at the plaque is not just "*t'ongil*" (unification) but "*minjokt'ongil*" (ethnic unification), translated as "unification of their Motherland."

Throughout the dissertation, I have discussed wish fulfillment, particularly in South Korean cinema, in which unification can be presented in an imaginary or fantasy environment, outside of reality. Here, this memorial is also an abstract representation of the wishes of unification, which have yet to be fulfilled. Looking up at the memorial from the lower level, next to the bell, the symbolic intent of this memorial is particularly striking. The points of the pillars that rise up into the sky "in the image of a rainbow" actually do not meet at the center as the plaque indicates. Rather, they almost meet, symbolizing not reunification itself but the wish for

reconciliation, as well as a failed promise of reunification of a sovereign Korean nation after liberation from Japanese colonization in 1945. Whether the non-converging points can be read with the optimism of a “not yet” or the pessimism of the failure of reunification to happen is up to the spectator. With the historic summit meeting on April 27<sup>th</sup>, 2018 between South Korean President Moon Jae-in and North Korean Leader Kim Jong-un and the recent announcement of concrete steps to officially end the Korean War, reunification and reconciliation as endless deferral can be part of the past. Yet, the ambiguity of the memorial’s noncovering points speaks to the fragility of the process of reconciliation, and especially, reunification. After all, there is a third reading beyond wishing for reunification or recognizing the impossibility of reconciliation. Perhaps the points in the memorial were never meant to match up after all; perhaps they were meant to bypass one another.

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